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This qualitative study uses narrative inquiry to investigate the lived experiences of Afro-Latina women immigrants to the southern United States. Through Critical Race Theory and Black Transnational Feminist Theory the researcher explores how Afro-Latina women negotiate the dynamics of race, class, and gender in their home countries and in the United States. The researcher collected the counternarratives of eight Afro-Latina women from the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and Panama. The researcher conducted individual and group interviews as well as field observations.

Using the words of the participants, the results of this study reveal five significant negotiations of race, class, and gender: Negotiations of Immigration and Class: “I did it for my family.”; Negotiations of Racism: “[T]here is a lot of racism here.”; Negotiations of Race and Identity: *Nationality First*: “I am not Mexican or African-American!”; Negotiations of Gender: ‘Women are now in all spheres.’; and Negotiations of Beauty: ‘*Pretty* is having long straight hair.’

NEGOTIATIONS OF RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER AMONG
AFRO-LATINA WOMEN IMMIGRANTS
TO THE SOUTHERN
UNITED STATES

by

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Approved by

Committee Chair

To my life partner, husband, and best friend Julian Douglas Gaither.

To my mother and greatest supporter, Tangela Hines Jones.

To my father, who is the epitome of goodness, Kacie Moore Jr.

To my beautiful son, Giovanni Douglas Gaither, may an insatiable thirst for learning and
education never be quenched.

APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Feminist and Critical Race Scholar Dr. Denise Baszile contends that all research is autobiographical. For this reason I believe it is essential that I situate my positionality as it relates to this study. I am an African-American woman who has taught Spanish in higher education for over sixteen years. I became a Spanish language educator after being drawn to the rich cultural practices and products endemic of Latin America. Upon learning Spanish I was struck by the melody of the Spanish language, the vast body of Hispanic literary genres, and of course the undeniable magnetism of salsa, bachata, and merengue. Most importantly, I was motivated by the realization that I could forge new and deeper relationships with Latin@s after having learned to communicate in their language. My passion as an undergraduate language learner soon led me to pursue a teaching career in modern languages.

Although I received a Bachelor's and a Master's degree in Spanish, and studied abroad in Latin America innumerable times, my schooling was a microcosm of both U.S. and Latin America's power politics. According to Leila Villaverde (2008), "A person, group, or ideology maneuvers power, and unless we discuss how power and its owner(s) are affected by the success or failure of its operation, social conditions cannot change effectively" (p. 1). In my academic and professional experiences the contributions of those most disenfranchised by Spain and Latin America's quest for power were ominously absent from our reading lists. There were secondary references made to ancient civilizations such as the Mayans, Aztecs, and Incas, and to a scarce degree the brutal African slave trade in Latin America; nevertheless, the voices of African and indigenous figures in Latin American history were omitted from the dominant spaces of our

textbook pages. I longed for my course content to reflect the multicultural experiences of my students. I knew that Latin America was bustling with diversity; however, such diversity remained hidden from our curriculum. According to Lisa Delpit (2006), “The problem...is that the cultures of marginalized groups in our society tend to be either ignored, misrepresented, viewed from an outsider perspective, or even denigrated” (p. 229). In an effort to draw personal connections to our course content, I felt it my responsibility to present multiple Latin American perspectives that would speak to the experiential knowledge of my diverse students. This dissertation study, which focuses on the negotiations of race, class, and gender among Afro-Latina women immigrants, is a direct response to the dearth of culturally responsive pedagogy to which I was exposed both as a student and as an educator.

Having been reared by strong matriarchs whose wisdom prepared me for many of life’s vicissitudes, I have always been captivated by women’s voices. Coupled with my undergraduate matriculation at a women’s college and my subsequent career as an instructor at a women’s college, I became passionate about elevating women’s voices in spaces where they were consistently omitted. For this reason, I incorporated materials into my courses that illuminated the plight of Afro-Latina women in particular, but also indigenous women. Audre Lorde (1995) explained,

To examine black women’s literature effectively requires that we be seen as whole people in our actual complexities—as individuals, as women, as human—rather than as one of those problematic but familiar stereotypes provided in this society in place of genuine images of black women. (p. 287)

Heeding Lorde’s (1995) wisdom, I sought to go beyond stereotypes in order to present a more complex portrait of Afro-Latina women to my students. Unfortunately, this was content to which I had never been exposed during my schooling; therefore, I went on a journey of exploration to locate the subjugated knowledge that had been hidden. I relied on research, guest speakers,

narratives, films and documentaries, music, and literature to unearth their stories. I considered the incorporation of this content as an act of social justice pedagogy. As educators “social justice should fit into every aspect of our lives. For me, social justice pedagogy is not an election, it is my responsibility” (Hines-Gaither as quoted by Glynn, Wesely, & Wassell, 2014, p. 3). My research continues to reveal that although silenced by history, Afro-Latin@s long to have their voices heard and validated by the academy.

“For education to have possibilities beyond intellectual subjugation, it must engage alternative ways of conceptualizing what and how we learn” (Cervenak, Cespedes, Souza, & Straub, 2002, p. 344). My journey to include Afro-Latin@ heritage in my courses led me to begin the process of what Herbert Kohl called *unlearning* the hidden curriculum and what Ann Diller termed *torpefication* (Diller, p. 7). In all of my unfinishedness, I am comforted by Diller’s words. “It takes considerable courage, **self-knowledge**, a brave heart, and honest openness to face one’s own **ignorance** and stay present to the concomitant experiences of **discomfort**, perhaps feeling **horrified** as well as torpified” (Diller, 1998, p. 8). Hence, I began to search voraciously for the *voces silenciadas* that I had never known. As a social justice educator and critical pedagogue, I had an obligation to ensure that my students never left my institution of higher learning without understanding that the blood that united us to Latin America was thicker than the waters that divided us. It is from these educational and vocational experiences that this doctoral study was born.

Statement of Research Problem

According to Criado & Reyes (2005),

[L]a obra de ... mujeres no ha tenido apenas difusión... Su escasa difusión se debe a varios motivos. En primer lugar, las casas editoriales, por lo general, prefieren publicar a escritores por lo que, en los mejores casos, tan solo un 20% de los autores publicados son mujeres. Por otro lado, la mayoría de las mujeres que logran ser publicadas pertenecen a un estrato social privilegiado. Se trata de mujeres que han tenido acceso a la educación y

disfrutan de cierto bienestar económico que les permite dedicarse a escribir, por lo tanto, son en su mayoría de origen europeo o blancas. Sus experiencias y sus historias no representan a la totalidad de la población femenina de su país sino a las mujeres de su clase social. (p. 144)

The work of ... women has hardly had dissemination. This lack of dissemination is due to various reasons. In the first place, the publishing houses, generally speaking, prefer to publish writers in which in the best cases, only 20% of authors are women. On the other hand, the majority of women that achieve publication belong to a certain privileged social stratum. They are women who have access to education and enjoy a certain economic well-being that allows them to dedicate themselves to writing; the majority are women of European or white origin. Their experiences and their histories do not represent the totality of the feminine population of their country but rather the women of their social class.

In an attempt to affirm the social locations of Afro-Latina women immigrants, this study privileges their unique experiences. This study investigates the manifold ways that Afro-Latina immigrants negotiate the dynamics of race, class, and gender. The participants are linked by both African lineage and gender; however, they are not a homogenous group. According to Lorde (1995), “Certainly there is a real difference between [women] of race, age, and sex;” however, “there is a pretense to a homogeneity of experience covered by the word sisterhood that does not in fact exist” (p. 285). Hill Collins (2009) concurred, “However well-meaning conversations among “women of color” concerning the meaning of color in the United States may be, such conversations require an analysis of how institutionalized racism produces color hierarchies among U.S. women” (p. 98). Undeniably, being women of Afro-Latin American descent, the participants share many experiences in common, which is what constitutes their *culture*. However, their narratives are meant to expose the peculiarities indicative of each of their lives. As a researcher, I see no value in forcing homogeneity; to the contrary according to Cervenak et al., (2002), “Universalizing claims to knowing and understanding life, and how all of “us” sharing particular identifications experience it, encourages distrust of folks who offer alternative visions” (p. 351). My goal as a researcher is to acknowledge the commonalities and distinctions amongst

my participants; however, I am conscious not to essentialize certain experiences at the risk of disregarding others. The purpose of this narrative study is to learn about Afro-Latina women's unique experiences with race, along with class and gender, both in their countries of origin and in their host country of the United States.

“Academe devalues personal experience as a way of knowing while emphasizing the knowledge of “high” theory as the only “real” route toward making sense of the world” (Cervenak et al., 2002, p. 349). For this reason, counterstories in Critical Race Theory are essential; it is up to the critical theorist to crash the good ole boys club and introduce counter experiences and perspectives. Paulo Freire (2012) declared that the silencing of those on the margins is antithetical to liberation. He called for educators, along with the oppressed, to reclaim dialogical spaces. According to Freire (2012), “Those who have been denied their primordial *right to speak their word* must first reclaim this right and prevent the continuation of this dehumanizing aggression” (p. 88). This study has provided a space for 8 Afro-Latinas' voices to be heard and to be memorialized in print. I hope that as the words of my participants walk onto the stages of my dissertation that they may find a platform to “reclaim the right of their words” (Freire, 2012, p. 88).

Research Questions

1. How does race impact the life stories and lived experiences of Afro-Latina women immigrants who were born in Latin America, but who now reside in the southern United States?
2. How do Afro-Latina women immigrants negotiate the intersections of race, class, and gender in their everyday experiences.

Summary of Research Chapters

In the introduction I detailed my background both as a second language learner and a second language educator. As an African-American undergraduate student I was one of few

blacks who pursued world languages as a major in the predominantly white and private institutions that I attended. Likewise, in each of my full-time teaching positions, I have served as the lone African-American language educator. Seeking to make meaningful connections between my cultural heritage and my discipline, I was immediately interested in exploring the contributions of Afro-Latin@s to Latin America. In the classroom I was compelled to expose my students to the range of diversities that have made Latin America who she is today, particularly with regard to the contributions of Afro descendants. The review of the literature will show how the investigation of the research questions fill a gap in the literature where Afro-Latin@ voices have been historically silenced. With this study I hope to draw meaningful conclusions that will contribute to the bustling body of research emerging on this topic. In Chapter two I present the review of the literature as it relates to Afro-Latina immigrants' lived experiences and their negotiations of race, class, and gender. I also present the theoretical frameworks—the intersections of Critical Race Theory and Black Transnational Feminism. In Chapter three I present my research epistemology as a Black feminist researcher and I show how my transnational epistemology informs my research practice. I present my subjectivity and detail how the acknowledgement of it worked as both a buffer and a shield as I entered the lives of eight participants. I expose my experiences as a researcher which, in relation to the participants, revealed points of convergence as well as divergence. Next, I present the qualitative research methodology that incorporates narrative inquiry and narrative analysis. Finally, I include strategies and reflections of trustworthiness while exposing the nuances and particularities of bilingual transnational research. In Chapter four I analyze the data while relying primarily on thematic analysis along with some discourse analysis. I undergird the analysis with the extracted codes drawn from the narrative texts of the eight participants. I illustrate the negotiations that participants make when navigating experiences of race, class, and gender.

The results of this study reveal five significant negotiations of race, class, and gender among Afro-Latina women immigrants to the U.S. South. The headings below highlight the words of my participants:

1. Negotiations of Immigration and Class: “I did it for my family.”
2. Negotiations of Race and Identity: *Nationality First*: “I am not Mexican or African-American!”
3. Negotiations of Racism: “[T]here is a lot of racism here.”
4. Negotiations of Gender: ‘Women are now in all spheres.’
5. Negotiations of Beauty: ‘*Pretty* is having long straight hair.’

Although I present specific sections that highlight the participants’ experiences with race, class, and gender, I use an intersectional approach which demonstrates how these stratifications work in tandem and not in isolation. In Chapter five I present conclusions that can be drawn from my study in conjunction with the research questions. I also present implications of the study along with implications for future research. Finally, I offer closing thoughts.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

An inability to conceptualize multiethnic persons reflects a colonial ideology of categorization and separation based on “pure blood” criteria—a system constructed for the white colonists to maintain power. (Alsultany, 2002, p. 109-110)

Literature Review

While many scholars are researching the growing Latino population in the United States, by comparison few have focused on the African descendants of U.S. Latino communities. Although not without critique, federally, it was not until the 2000 U.S. Census that Latin@s were asked to distinguish their race from their ethnicity. The related 2010 U.S. Census questions read as follow.

→ NOTE: Please answer BOTH Question 5 about Hispanic origin and Question 6 about race. For this census, Hispanic origins are not races.

5. Is this person of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?

☐ No, not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin

☐ Yes, Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano

☐ Yes, Puerto Rican

☐ Yes, Cuban

☐ Yes, another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin — *Print origin, for example, Argentinean, Colombian, Dominican, Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, Spaniard, and so on.* ↗

6. What is this person's race? Mark ☒ one or more boxes.

☐ White

☐ Black, African Am., or Negro

☐ American Indian or Alaska Native — *Print name of enrolled or principal tribe.* ↗

<input type="checkbox"/> Asian Indian	<input type="checkbox"/> Japanese	<input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian
<input type="checkbox"/> Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/> Korean	<input type="checkbox"/> Guamanian or Chamorro
<input type="checkbox"/> Filipino	<input type="checkbox"/> Vietnamese	<input type="checkbox"/> Samoan
<input type="checkbox"/> Other Asian — <i>Print race, for example, Hmong, Laotian, Thai, Pakistani, Cambodian, and so on.</i> ↗	<input type="checkbox"/> Other Pacific Islander — <i>Print race, for example, Fijian, Tongan, and so on.</i> ↗	

☐ Some other race — *Print race.* ↗

Figure 1. Questions on Hispanic Origin and Race from 2010 U.S. Census. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census Questionnaire.

In response to the new census instrument, Hitlin et al. (2007) noted, “By focusing on the “outside-in,” the current governmental standards run the risk of imposing categories on individuals that make little sense to those being categorized, thus demonstrating how a sophisticated analytical distinction can lead to a shallow operationalization” (p. 590).

Given that most Latin American countries have not adequately acknowledged constructions of race and tend to tout national identity as premium, many Latin@ immigrants may not have previously categorized their identities in racial or ethnic terms. For this reason the subsequent literary review addresses the complexities of U.S. ethno-racial stratifications when imposed on Latin@ immigrants. The review of the literature reveals an inconsistent standard on the part of U.S. scholars and official government agencies in analyzing Latin@ racial identity construction. Most often a U.S. model of racial categorization is imposed. There are complex factors that influence the ways that Latin@s construct their identities. Like other U.S. residents, Latin@s must also confront the intersections of race, class, and gender and negotiate how these categories disproportionately affect darker skinned Latin@s. According to Bonilla-Silva (2004), “Analysts will have to come to terms with the fact that ...members within some of these [Latin@] groups have vastly different experiences” (p. 941).

Various researchers (Amaro & Zambrana, 2000; Espinosa & Harris, 2000; Frank et al., 2010; Hitlin et al., 2007; Perea, 2000; Saperstein, 2006; Vaquera & Kao, 2006) troubled the U.S. Census’s new classification system that probes Latin@s to select a racial categorization in addition to their ethnicity. Some argue that the Census has levied a U.S. racialized paradigm to construct the identity of Latin American immigrants. Espinosa (2000) explained, “We [Latin@s] imagine ourselves as Spanish, as Mexican, as “Americans,” but none of these labels seems to fit” (p. 446). “Racial categories’ purpose has usually been geopolitical. Meanings attached to identities shift not only over time and space but also according to political circumstances”

(Alsultany, 2002, p. 109). Although researchers often rely on census data as a starting point for research projects, it is imperative that scholars understand that numbers can never tell a story in its totality. The numbers must be balanced, scrutinized, and interrogated by other means of data collection. For this research study, I balance the census data with both qualitative and quantitative research findings.

With little consideration of Latin America's diversity, the U.S. Census "tends to classify all other groups into a simple black-white paradigm. This binary conceptualization of race in the United States is complicated by the increasing number of [Latin@] immigrants" (Vaquera and Kao, 2006, p. 378). The *browning* of the United States is a ubiquitous topic that scholars, researchers, and analysts are investigating. According to the 2010 U.S. Census (2011), the U.S. Office of Management and Budgets (OMB) defines black or African-American as anyone who has origins in the black racial groups of Africa (Rastogi, Johnson, Hoeffel, & Drewery, 2011, p. 2). Commensurately, Latino is defined as anyone with Spanish culture or origin regardless of race. *This study uses the terms Latino and Hispanic interchangeably.* It is imperative to address historical context in terms of U.S. racialization of Latin@s.

As immigration from Latin American countries increased, ...the United States found it necessary to classify these migrants into a single "group" of people, resulting in a flattening of national differences. People from Latin America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean became racialized as *Hispanic* (Oboler, 1995) or as *black* because of phenotypic similarities to particular racial and ethnic groups institutionalized in the United States (Candelario, 2001; Torres-Saillant, 2000) (Simmons, 2009, p. 65-66).

According to the 2010 U.S. Census Briefs (Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, Albert, 2011), between 2000 and 2010 the Latino population increased by 43% from 35.3 million to 50.4 million (Ennis, 2011, p. 3). In comparison, the black population increased by 12% from 34.7 million to 38.9 million over the same time period. These data reflect a racial shift in the total U.S. population, bringing the Latino and black populations to 16.3% and 13.6% respectively (Rastogi et al., 2011).

Such dramatic shifts have caused some states to now comprise a majority minority population (CA, D.C., HI, NM, TX).

OMG defines white as anyone having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa (Hixson, Hepler, Kim, 2011, p. 2). The *white alone* population grew by 6 % from 211.5 million to 223.6 million. But while the *white alone* population rose numerically from the 2000 to the 2010 Census, its proportion of the total U.S. population declined from 75% to 72%.

Table 1. 2000 and 2010 U.S. Census Population Trends by Race

U.S. Population Demographic	2000 U.S. Census	2010 U.S. Census	Increase from 2000-2010	Proportion of the total U.S. population
Latino	35.3 million	50.4 million	43%	Rose to 16.3%
Black	34.7 million	38.9 million	12%	Rose to 13.6%
White	211.5 million	223.6 million	6%	Declined from 75% to 72%

Being that the Census data confirms that blacks and Latin@s are steadily rising numerically in the United States, today there are multiple scholars who published on race and racial stratifications within the Latino population (Bonilla Silva, 2004; Frank, Akresh, & Lu, 2010; Herring et al., 2004; Hitlin, Brown, & Elder, 2007); *however, few scholars have focused their work specifically on the experiences of Afro-Latina women* (Candelario, 2004; de Casanova, 2003; Foote, 2004; Lebon, 2007; Vega, Alba & Modestin, 2012).

To understand the complexity of Latino identity formation, one must consider the historical context of most Latin American countries. “A cursory understanding of Latin American history demonstrates that people of all races intermarried, including those of African, European, and Asian origins and populations native to the land” (Amaro & Zambrana, 2000, pg. 1724). As a

result of the annihilation of Latin America's Native populations (Aztecs, Mayans, Incans, and the Boricuas (Taínos) to name a few), noted Spanish conquistadors Hernán Cortes, Diego Velazquez, and others began to traffic African slaves to Latin America, some 4 times the amount brought to U.S. colonies. According to Urbanski (1972), from the 16th century through the 19th century "about 15 million black Africans were coercively brought to Latin America largely through the southern coast of Cuba" (as cited in Vaquera and Kao, 2006, p. 378). Subsequently there were various waves of voluntary migration as well as forced migration to Latin America that added to its cultural montage.

In order to deduce the origins of the African presence in Latin America and to place their presence in a contemporary context, this study delves deeply into the racial histories of the countries that are represented herein: the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and Panama. The historical context will be a necessary exploration in order to expose and to trouble the fact that *Africanidad* (*Africanness*) arrived in Latin America through coercion and expropriation. Undeniably, the African presence in Latin America illuminates its cultural diversity; however, it stands distinct from preceding and subsequent waves of voluntary migration by other ethnic groups.

For example, according to Martinez Montiel (1981), the Asian presence in Latin America dates back to the 16th century after the Spanish colonization of the Philippines. Migrants from Asia, however, surged during the 19th century due to civil instability, natural disaster, and economic hardships (as cited in Vaquera and Kao, 2006, p. 378). A century later, many Chinese and West Indian immigrants elected to come to Panama to construct the Panama Canal. Given the *mélange* of cultures flowing into the reservoir of Latino cultural heritage, "Hispanics are a population composed of multiracial people" (Amaro & Zambrana, 2000, pg. 1724).

Godstein and Morning (2000) revealed that multiracial heritage is complex, and as such should not be narrowly defined. Numerous definitions of a multiracial population exist, including:

...the population with mixed racial ancestry, the population of people aware of having mixed racial ancestry, and the population of people who report that they are multiracial on surveys. Thus, an individual's physical appearance may not always match her reported racial identity, which in turn may not necessarily match her ancestry. (As cited in Saperstein, 2006, p. 59).

As my participant pool will reflect, *Afro-Latinidad* is not necessarily indicative of phenotype given that it refers to *African ancestry*, which may or may not be visible by *race*. A Panamanian colleague shared the following, "It's much more difficult from my perspective because I kind of feel like I don't fit into any one mold. I'm a black woman – that's what everyone sees – but I can't change my culture, I'm a Hispanic woman as well" (Garnes, 2013). Afro-descendants reflect a range of skin tones including, but not limited to, black, brown, indigenous, mestizo, and white. In essence, the terminology *Afro* extends far beyond the western conceptualization of *blackness* to include an ancestral link that can be traced back to Mother Africa. Resulting from centuries of race mixing and blanqueamiento (whitening practices), in some instances this link to the motherland may appear less visible causing some to be termed "Black behind the ears" (Candelario, 2007). *Black behind the ears* affirms that African ascendancy flows richly through the veins of African descendants; however, it may be reserved for the recondite spaces of their identities.

In the selection of participants I deliberately sought a range of physical characteristics and backgrounds to demonstrate that *Afro-Latinidad* often goes beyond what the eyes can see. Although all participants acknowledge and affirm their African heritage, many are officially or unofficially categorized as *black* in their home countries, some as *Indians*, others as *mulatas*, with

the remainder being recorded as *white*. Panamanian participant Iris expounded upon the range of *Afro-Latinidad* pervasive of her native Panama. Iris cited the following.

Una antropóloga francesa hizo un estudio en Panama y descubrieron que la Península Azuero donde hay ojos azules, blancos, y cabello rubio, esas familias tenían ascendencia de negros cimarrones. Negro detrás de todo eso. Entonces en Panama nadie puede decir yo soy puro.

A French anthropologist did a study in Panama and discovered that in the Azuero Peninsula where there are blue eyes, whites, and blonde hair, those families had descended from black escaped slaves. *They were black behind all of [those features]*. So then, in Panama no one can say I am pure.

Along with Iris' acknowledgement of a racial *mélange* inherent in Panama, the Dominican participants also supported the notion of *mestizaje* (racial mixing) in their native Santo Domingo. The following exchange between Afro-Dominican participants María and Julia, who are aunt and niece respectively, demonstrates the complexity of identity politics. María is quite fair-skinned and is considered *white* in the Dominican whereas her niece Julia is brown-skinned and is considered *morena* (black to brown) in the Dominican. In the dialogue that follows the participants explained the diversity of complexions found in their family.

María: Bueno en mi familia la mayoría son de mi color. Hay dos o tres como ella (Julia), tengo otra tía, tengo los hermanos de ella. Uno que es morenito pero mayormente predominamos de mi color, más claritos que moreno.

Well in my family the majority are my color. There are two or three like her (Julia), I have another aunt, I have her brothers. One is brown but most of us are my color, more fair than brown.

Julia: Es que nosotros salimos más a mi mamá. Mi mamá era morena. Entonces mi papá, el abuelo de ella (María)... It's that we came out more like my mother. My mother was brown. So my dad, the grandfather of María....

María: No era blanco, era más de *tú* color.

He was not white, he was more like *your* color (indicating Krishauna's brown skinned complexion).

Julia: Pero no era más moreno, entonces nosotros salimos más morenos.

But he was not that dark, so we came out more brown.

María: Salimos mezclados. Pero sí hay claros y más oscuros.

We came out mixed. But yes, some of us are fair-skinned and others are darker.

Both women concluded that their variance of complexions is likely due to procreation between their lighter skinned and darker skinned parents and grandparents. However, even in the same family self-disclosure is not without disagreement. María & Julia spent a few moments debating how dark their respective father and grandfather actually was. María thought he was lighter and Julia thought he was not quite as dark. Notwithstanding, they both determined that their family is composed of mixed people.

Martin and Yeung (2003) offered an overt critique of social scientists. They contended,

Few social scientists practice in their research what many have been preaching in their theories and classrooms for the past 20 years: that race is not a static, biological characteristic, but a socially constructed one, which can vary over time, place and social context. (As cited in Saperstein, 2006).

A father of Cultural Studies, British Sociologist Stuart Hall (1997) asserted in a documentary titled, *Race the Floating Signifier*, that race is more indicative of a socio-historical cultural language than a biological foundation. Hall (1997) stated that because the language of race “is relational and not essential, it can never be finally fixed, but is subject to the constant process of redefinition and appropriation.” Similarly, Alsultany (2002) stated, “That such meanings change indicates that we can alter them. We can create a new cartography” (p. 109). Although I certainly agree that like any part of our identity, race may be fluid, nevertheless, the fluidity of our identities is also based on social construction. Along with accepting those who chart new racial cartographies as a way of reclaiming agency over their own bodies and identities,

I also have a responsibility as a researcher to analyze the social conditions that may influence one's decision to shift between racial categories or to reject racial categorization all together. For example, I will later present a study of a Mexican-born student who chose to identify as Spanish as a rejection of negative Mexican stereotypes.

Saperstein (2006) cited numerous studies (Almaguer, 1994; Davis, 2001; Lopez, 1996) that reveal that U.S. residents are far more strategic when selecting their racial and ethnic identities based on the "pursuit of political clout, citizenship rights, economic advantages, or for more symbolic, social reasons" (p. 60). According to Saperstein (2006),

Individuals may report only one ancestry despite their knowledge of other options to try to "pass" entirely from a disadvantaged group into a more advantaged one. Meanwhile, an interviewer might reach a conclusion about a respondent's race based on the individual's physical appearance, the appearance of others in the home or neighborhood, or the respondent's English proficiency, demeanor or visible signs of social status. (p. 60)

Saperstein's (2006) observation reminds me of a presentation that I recently attended in Orlando, Florida at the national convention of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (2013 Nov). A scholar from Duke University, Dr. Fernández-Vargas, shared research that included one of her Mexican students who although he appears white, was born in Mexico to two Mexican parents. He and his family later immigrated to the United States from Mexico. Discordant with his Mexican heritage, the student solely identifies as a Spaniard from Spain citing that one of his great grandparents was from Spain. Upon further interrogation, the student revealed that he chooses to identify as Spanish as a means to mediate society's distrust and negative perceptions of Mexican immigrants. Cheryl Harris (1993) asserted, "*Passing* is not an obsolete phenomenon that has slipped into history" (p. 1713). On the other hand, Bettez's (2012) multiracial participants claimed agency even though they could comfortably *pass*. Bettez (2012)

wrote, “Tina, who to most people “looks white” and does not speak Spanish, said she had to constantly “out” herself as Mexican year after year” (p. 116).

Since a participant’s identity may shift given the context or perceived risks or advantages, Saperstein (2006) highlighted that *“neither the interviewers’ or the respondents’ classifications should be considered the “right” one for all purposes”* (p. 62). Highlighting the complexities aforementioned, Saperstein (2006) advised that it may be better practice to use “observed race for studies of discrimination, or access to goods and services, while self-reported race might be more useful for studies of attitudes and motivations” (p. 71). In harmony with Hall and Saperstein’s findings, Vaquera and Kao (2006) reported that sociological researchers increasingly “emphasize the importance of the fluidity of race” (p. 390). Vaquera and Kao (2006) “encourage future researchers to examine how racial identity changes over the life course, especially among minority youth” (p. 390).

The research previously cited reveals a remarkable gap: Researchers have failed to allow Latin@ participants the space to explain how they come to fashion their identities. For multiracial people in particular, and arguably for all people, the complexities of identity go far beyond what a census check in a given box can provide. Although many researchers have noted the manifold variables (history, national origin, exposure and context, partner selection, age, phenotype, perceived risks & advantages etc.) that may influence the ways in which Latin@s self-identify their race, to date few studies allow them to explicate the reasons for their self-categorization.

Saperstein (2006) probed that since race is a social construction that is not static and may change over time, social context, and place, theories related to racial self-identification or observed race on the part of the researchers...

...require at least as much explanation-regarding how it came about and what it signifies-as it provides of how another variable of interest is distributed across the population. *It*

also follows that there is no “true” measure of race, but numerous possible perspectives and interpretations. (p. 70)

Related to their research, Vaquera and Kao (2006) also conceded, “We do not have measures on what racial and ethnic identities mean to these adolescents; we have no measures of the content of identification” (p. 389). Multiracial scholar Alsultany (2002) also advised, “Recasting our moving selves begins with an openness and a willingness to listen, which leads to dialogue” (p. 110). Through employing narrative inquiry, this dissertation study fills a gap. It offers participants the opportunity to share thick responses to questions of identification. Although it is impossible to give voice, as the researcher I made a concerted effort to hear the participants’ voices and to provide a dialogical space for their explanations (Riessman, 1993).

Vaquera and Kao (2006) also acknowledged the limitations inherent when imposing a U.S. racial construct onto immigrant groups; however, in agreement with the seminal research of Omi and Winant (1986), Vaquera and Kao (2006) conceded “that while the concept of race has been undertheorized...by cultural pluralists, it is nonetheless one of the most important distinctions by which social status and class is conferred. I remind you of Saperstein’s (2006) recommendation that it may be better practice to use “observed race for studies of discrimination, or access to goods and services, while self-reported race might be more useful for studies of attitudes and motivations” (p. 71). Correspondent to Saperstein’s recommendation, researchers (see Arce, Murguia, and Frisbie 1987; Keith and Herring 1991; Gomez, 2000) found a direct link between physical characteristics and socio-economic status for both African-Americans and Hispanics (Vaquera and Kao, 2006, p. 379).

The 2003 New Immigrant Survey (NIS) used skin color to categorize respondents by race, albeit obviously problematic as the previous section reveals. The NIS used a skin color scale in which interviewers rated “respondent’s skin color as closely as possible to the shades shown in

an array of 10 progressively darker hands (1 is lightest, 10 is darkest)” (Frank et al., 2010, p. 384). The second step was for the Latin@ respondents to self-identify their race.

Frank et al. (2010) used data gathered from over 1,500 surveys of usable data (meaning completed surveys) retrieved from the NIS to ascertain whether “the U.S. color-based racial classification system affect Latin@ immigrants, even though they themselves may not readily identify with an existing racial group” (Frank et al., 2010, p. 379). According to Bettez (2012), “Latino/as often view themselves and are treated as people from a distinct racial category” (p. 28). Frank et al. (2010) support the fact that many Latin@s prefer to identify based on their ethnicity (Hispanic or Latin@) or their national origin (Uruguayan, Cuban, etc.) as opposed to race (black, white etc.). However, Frank et al. (2010) “evaluate Latinos’ place in racial terms, as opposed to ethnic, because racial boundaries are understood to be more exclusionary than ethnic boundaries in the United States” (Frank et al., 2010, p. 379). Like Frank et al., although Hitlin et al. (2007) offered strong evidence that few Latin@s may identify themselves based on race, a construct common in United States discourse, they too agree that “race has been historically employed to connote the supposed biological superiority and inferiority of various social groups” and therefore remains a “socially real category” (Hitlin et al., 2007, p. 593). Later I will offer evidence through discourse analysis that although many Latin@s residing in the United States may primarily identify by national origin, there also continues to be a deep rooted identification system based on race within the Spanish lexicon as well.

On the NIS survey, of the 1539 Latin@ respondents, 79% identified as white, about 7.5% identified as non-white, while roughly 14% refused to identify any race. With respect to the NIS survey, the respondents with a lighter skin tone were more likely to identify as white than those who selected the category of non-white (Frank et al., 2010, p. 388). National origin plays an important role in distinguishing how Latin@s in the United States self-identify their race. Cubans

and South Americans disproportionately identify as white, while “Dominicans are more likely not to choose any racial identification category” (Frank et al., 2010, p. 389). Mexicans had a high propensity to identify as white, but they also had high numbers for refusing to select a racial category (Frank et al, 2010).

There are many variables that influence how Latin@s identify. For example, Dominicans who live in predominantly black neighborhoods are more likely to identify as black. In part this pattern may be due to external racialization. Dominican scholar, Silvio Torres-Saillant (2005) is hopeful that Dominicans who identify as black might help to mediate racial tensions and perhaps even lead to political solidarity. Torres-Saillant (2005) stated,

The emergence of the self-recognition of Afro-Latinos as members of a differentiated ethnoracial constituency places them in an ideal position to mediate with the black community. Their negroid phenotype can open them to doors of communication with African Americans. The mediating role of Afro-Latinos, coupled with the persuasive espousal of black symbols and urban youth culture within the Hispanic population, may very well hold the key to a salutary future in the relationship between Latinos and African Americans. (p. 301)

Since this study seeks to better understand cross-cultural relationships, Torres-Saillant’s (2005) conclusions will be addressed in future research to determine the extent to which they possess empirical merit.

The data also suggest that older Latin@s are more likely to select white as their race, while younger Latin@s choose the Census category of “some other race” (Frank et al, 2010). According to Dowling (2004), amongst Mexicans, it is common that individuals married to a white spouse are more likely to choose *white* as their race. Conversely, Latin@s who marry non-white spouses are more likely to select “some other race” (As quoted in Frank et al., 2010, p. 387).

In terms of economic effects on racial identification, the data is inconclusive. According to Michael & Timberlake (2008), respondents with higher income levels were more likely to claim agency and reject any racial categorization by solely identifying as Hispanic/Latin@; however, Schwartzman (2007) found just the opposite. Higher income increased the likelihood of Latin@s identifying as white “through a social whitening process linked to increased status attainment” (as quoted in Frank et al., 2010, p. 387).

After accounting for any relative differences between the samples, such as education etc., Frank et al., (2010) found that “Latin@s with darker skin earn, on average, \$2,500 less per year than their lighter-skinned counterparts” (p. 393). According to Logan (2010), “Compared to other Hispanic groups, black Hispanics’ neighborhoods have the lowest median income, the highest share of poor residents, and the lowest share of homeowners” (p. 479). After controlling for other variables, “it appears that the relative nature of racial phenotype is important,” indicating that Latin@ immigrants are not all treated equally in their host country (Frank et al., 2010, p. 393). In chapter four I present participants’ narratives that correspond to the theoretical data aforementioned.

Theoretical Frameworks

Black Transnational Feminist Theory and Critical Race Theory

I identify as a black feminist researcher who conducts transnational research. In feminist epistemology, there is no single research method or epistemology (Hesse-Biber, 2004). More importantly, feminist research seeks a multiplicity of women’s voices (Anderson, 1995). According to Anderson (1995), in an attempt to combat androcentric research, feminist epistemology must begin with women’s lives. As a feminist researcher, I aim to extinguish the invisibility that plagues Afro-Latina women’s experiences by employing narrative research methods. For this study, I theorize Black Transnational Feminism (BTF) as well as Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the lens through which I collect and analyze the data. I have found that not only

are CRT and Black Transnational Feminism the epistemological and theoretical lenses with which I engage my data, but they are also the most applicable theories to shape and to frame the literature review as well as the participants' narratives. Throughout this study I reference the intersections of CRT with BTF where applicable.

Both the qualitative and quantitative data on Afro-Latin@ experiences support a theoretical framework that is grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT). Although the CRT data foregrounds race, there is also a strong interrogation of class and gender. According to Yosso, T., Villalpando, O., Delgado Bernal, D., & Solórzano, D., (2001), 'CRT centralizes race and racism and their intersections with other forms of oppression' (p. 472-473). According to Hill Collins (2000),

Because black women have access to both the Afrocentric and the feminist standpoints, an alternative epistemology used to rearticulate a black woman's standpoint should reflect elements of *both traditions*. The search for the distinguishing features of an alternative epistemology used by African-American women reveals that values and ideas Africanist scholars identify as characteristically "black" often bear remarkable resemblance to similar ideas claimed by feminist scholars as characteristically "female." (p. 260)

The joining of Afrocentric and feminist standpoints is not without critique due to the admonishment of uninterrogated universals such as the *quintessential black woman* or the *homogenous black community*. As a common critique of Critical Race Theory, a danger of universalism is the abandonment of other variables such as class and sexuality. In critique of Hill Collins' amalgam of afrocentricity and feminism, E. Frances White (1995) wrote,

Collins' quest for universal truth will be doomed to failure as long as she accepts as unproblematic an Afrocentric sisterhood across class, time, and geography. Her truths depend on an Afrocentric ideology that suppresses differences among African Americans. (p. 521)

While rejecting a presentation of an inviolable black sisterhood, as a black feminist scholar, I recognize the bridges between Afrocentric consciousness and feminist thought as explicated by Hill Collins. In citing the contributions of black feminist Filomina Chioma Steady (1987), White (1995) also acknowledged that certain cohesions of experience based on shared ancestry do exist and are well represented in the literature. White (1995) stated,

These works have significantly raised the level of understanding of the connections among women in Africa and its diaspora...women from Africa and the African diaspora are united by a history of “economic exploitation and marginalization manifested through slavery and colonization”...and through neocolonialism in the United States. (White, 1995, p. 518-519)

Although my Pan African participants are linked by some experiences that are commonly shared by colonized people, my transnational research simultaneously reveals inconsistencies of experiences that unhinge the notion of universality. Throughout this study I present the research through the theoretical amalgams of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Black Transnational Feminism (BTF) within the contexts of both qualitative and quantitative research findings.

Journey to Black Transnational Feminism as a Theoretical Framework

To date I have taken several qualitative research courses that provided me the opportunity to conduct small scale research projects related to the dissertation. For these courses I interviewed Afro-Latina women immigrants who resided mostly in North Carolina, but also in New Orleans, LA and Montreal, Quebec. Although I had already situated the study in CRT, I had no intention of using BTF as a theoretical framework; however, the more I listened to the participants' stories, along with published qualitative data, the more feminist ideologies and paradigms emerged. Although I recognized feminist rhetoric in the transcripts and in the review of the literature, I was hesitant to name it as such because my participants never actually used the word feminism, feminist, or any other related term. *Could I classify their words as feminist without their owning*

the term themselves? Postcolonial and transnational feminist from India, Chandra Mohanty (2002), posed many of the same questions in her personal reflections on Third World women and their relationship to feminism. Mohanty (2002) stated, “Charting the ground for an analysis of Third World women and the politics of feminism is no easy task...Can we assume that Third World women’s political struggles are necessarily “feminist”? How do we/they define feminism?” (p. 44).

After heartfelt reflection and a commitment not to co-op my participants’ narratives, I determined that what the respondents were revealing was in fact very feminist in nature, although unidentified as such. Given my investigation of feminisms throughout the African diaspora I have unearthed a firm foundation in which to ground the experiences of my research participants and my literary review. Black Transnational Feminism in communion with the review of the literature offered a comprehensive foundation that proved applicable to the multicultural feminist experiences of my respondents. I found that no *one* form of feminism set in isolation spoke to the complexities of my data. Native American feminist, Uma Narayan (2004) stated, “It would be misleading to suggest that feminist epistemology is a homogenous and cohesive enterprise” (p. 213).

It was clear to me that what my participants shared did not fit neatly within mainstream western feminist paradigms. Their stories were more closely related to a Black Transnational Feminist praxis in which it is common for black women to *do* feminist works and/or conceptualize feminist thought without actually naming it as such. The Boston chapter of the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO), The Combahee River Collective (1995), also concluded that although some black women may not identify as feminist, their lives are affected by sexism no less.

They surmised,

There is also undeniably a personal genesis for black feminism, that is, the political realization that comes from the seemingly personal experiences of individual black women's lives. Black feminists and many more black women who do not define themselves as feminists, have all experienced sexual oppression as a constant factor in our day-to-day existence. (p. 233)

The issues that concerned my transnational participants aligned with documented tenets of feminism in general, and Black Feminism in particular such as mothering, dominant beauty standards, internalized inferiority, assault on the black female body, incorporation of faith, spirituality and religion as both empowering and oppressive, the lack of black women's representation in various spaces, voicelessness and invisibility, and building a collective struggle that is inclusive of black men to name a few. The major contributions during the late 1980s and 1990s of Black Feminists such as the aforementioned Steady, Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, Andrea Benton Rushing, and Sharon Harley, opened an emerging body of literature "known as African women's diaspora studies" (White, 1995, p. 518).

Influenced by nationalist impulses, they criticize much of the earlier literature on black women for using a white filter to understand African culture. Further, they persuasively argue that too often black women are presented as one-dimensional victims of patriarchy or racism. (White, 1995, p. 519)

Wishing to contribute to the work of these early Black Transnational Feminists as well as modern voices of the movement, I elected to incorporate BTF as a theoretical framework in which to ground the voices of my participants.

Overview of Selected Black Transnational Feminism

Due to the paucity of published third world feminist theory, access to broad-based feminist networks within the African diaspora continues to be a work in progress. Mohanty (2003) noted, "Unlike the history of Western (white, middle-class) feminisms, which has been

explored in great detail over the last few decades, histories of Third World women's engagement with feminism are in short supply" (p. 45). In my review of the literature, my scarce findings were concurrent with those of Mohanty. Therefore, I focused on Latin American countries whose feminist stories had been captured in print, albeit not an exhaustive representation. I also considered my research participants, many of whom come from different parts of Latin America including the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and Central America. Therefore, I included some of those regions in my theoretical analysis. In an effort not to essentialize the regions or countries of my participants, I went beyond their countries of origin by also incorporating African voices from Nigeria, Senegal, and Ghana. I was also influenced by Molefi Asanti's *Afrocentricism* in which he encourages scholars of the African diaspora not to begin our theorizing with our countries of colonization, but instead to begin with the African continent. Lastly, you will also find representations of African-American and South American feminist voices.

In the case of African feminism, by far the proceeding overview of noted African feminists is not representative of the vast diversity of feminist thought found throughout the continent. There are other contemporary voices such as Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie who proudly claim the feminist mantra. However, Adichie also redefines and renegotiates western feminism by situating her feminist voice within an African context. In her TED talks and her novels, Adichie has poignantly noted the intense diversity of experiences amongst her fellow Africans and Nigerians. Some of these cultural differences are evident in the manner in which African feminists have reappropriated feminism to better address their cultural experiences. As my scholarship evolves, I look forward to continuing to explore diverse feminist perspectives as well as those representative of Black Transnational Feminism throughout the African diaspora.

In reviewing the feminisms of various countries of the African diaspora I observed multiple intersections within black feminist movements as well as notable distinctions. Although I make many critical correlations between the feminist theory of black women of Africa, the United States, and Latin America, I have also illuminated the particularities of the respective movements where relevant. While there is a wealth of information related to feminism as a whole, in Latin America the information is less visible with respect to the African descendants in Latin America and also on the African continent. As my research will reflect, even though African descendant women have engaged feminist work and thought for centuries, some African women and men have also rejected western feminist ideologies due to their perception that it lacks cultural relevance and cultural responsiveness. To this end, Cervenak et al. (2002) asserted,

Feminists of color have challenged hegemonic feminists and cultural nationalists by marking the complexity of the multiple differences they live. Sometimes this challenge entails a critique of the exclusively white female body constructed by second-wave feminist homogenization of the category “*woman*.” (p. 346)

Kolawole (1997) also asserted that many African women “have problems with the definitions and conceptualization of feminism as it is transmitted from the West with the presumption that this perception of women’s issues is universal and relevant to all women globally” (p. 8). Some Africans interpret an acceptance of western labeling as *kikusuku*, which is the African concept of parroting what one has heard or memorized from another.

Relatedly, although Afro-Latinas may have published feminist theory to a greater degree than their African counterparts, the Afro-Latina feminist movements typically took shape in the 1990s; some 20 years after the second wave movement began in the United States. According to Sonia Alvarez (1999), “New, more formalized modalities of articulation or networking among the multiple spaces and places of feminist politics were consolidated during the 1990s. These [include] region wide identity and issue-focused networks, like the Afro-Latin American and

Caribbean Women's Network..." (p. 184-185). In both Latin America and Africa, although feminist work and thought have been prevalent over several decades (and arguably centuries), grounding their work and theory in print came some time later and continues to be an emerging body of work. Black Transnational Feminism bridges the lived experiences of black women throughout the diaspora by drawing upon manifold commonalities as well as our respective needs. Hooks (2000), too, recognized the need for black women to work with other black women of the diaspora for political actualization. Hooks (2000) was conscious of the unifying themes that unite many black women as well as the points of divergence. Although black women are separated by oceans, languages, experiences, and some cultural nuances, BTF can serve as a cultural and theoretical bridge. According to hooks (2000), "Women must find various ways to communicate with one another cross-culturally if we are to develop political solidarity. When women of color strive to learn with and about one another, we take responsibility for building Sisterhood" (p. 60). I esteem hooks' (2000) model of solidarity as a transnational network that not only includes African-American women, but solidarity with all women, and particularly with women of color given the manifold ways that colonialism has strategized to divide us.

Renegotiating Feminism: Power of Self-Definitions

Upon researching the Black Transnational Feminism of African nations (Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal), the United States, the Caribbean, and parts of South America many similarities emerged. The most tangible theme amongst Black Transnational Feminists is the unwavering desire to self-define and to self-name.

Given the physical limitations on black women's mobility, the conceptualization of self that has been part of black women's self-definition is distinctive. Self is not defined as the increased autonomy gained by separating oneself from others. Instead, self is found in the context of family and community. (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 113)

The necessity of self-naming and self-definition is evident in the many rearticulated terms that Africana women have coined such as Alice Walker's *Womanism*, bell hook's Black Feminism, Nigerian Kolawole's *African Womanism*, Ghanaian Aidoo's *Stiwanism*, Patricia Hill Collins's *Black Feminist Thought*, and Clenora Hudson-Weem's *Africana Womanism* to name a few.

With the goal not being to eradicate feminism, Nigerian feminist Kolawole (1997) is clear that a "simultaneous existence of various feminisms is inevitable" (p. 13). The renegotiation of feminism need not be viewed as discordant. To the contrary, at its core, many Black Transnational Feminist movements are underscored by western feminist tenets; however, these tenets must be shifted and metamorphosed to align with Africana women's needs. Hooks (2000) proclaimed, "One factor that makes interaction between multi-ethnic groups of women difficult and sometimes impossible is our failure to recognize that a behavior pattern in one culture may be unacceptable in another, that it may have different signification cross-culturally" (p. 57). According to Kolawole (2002), "People should be free to name the struggle as they desire and get on with achieving the goal of gender equity, making African women more visible in all sectors, and playing transformational roles for social change" (p. 97).

Another key intersection of Black Transnational Feminism is that most transnational feminist movements begin as uncategorized movements. According to Kolawole (1997), "Women's concerted effort is not an academic exercise to the majority of Africans. They fight for their rights in different ways and for different reasons" (p. 20). Women often start their "movements" by engaging in grassroots organizing for the purpose of uplifting women and their communities. They typically do not enter their work as a *movement* or with something called *feminism* in mind. African scholars reject the western notion that *feminism* is not at work unless the term is explicitly used. African women document that historically they have always ignited movements dedicated to the empowerment and equitable treatment of their entire communities,

including women and men. Many African scholars acknowledge that they were (and still are) doing the work long before they knew that there was a term for it. Since much of their work is from the ground up, all the more reason that there is an imperative to define their movements for themselves.

Kolawole (1997) prefers the term, *African Womanism*. “To Africans Womanism is the totality of feminine self-expression, self-retrieval, and self-assertion in positive cultural ways” (p. 24). For Nigerian womanist Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi,

Black womanism is a philosophy that celebrates black roots, the ideals of black life, while giving a balanced presentation of black womanhood. It concerns itself as much with the black sexual power tussle as with the world power structure that subjugates blacks. (as cited in Kolawole, 1997, p. 24)

Another renegotiation of feminism is from Ghanaian feminist/stiwanist Ama Ata Aidoo (1994).

I have...advocated the word ‘Stiwanism’, instead of feminism, to bypass the combative discourses that ensue whenever one raises the issue of feminism in Africa...The word ‘feminism’ itself seems to be a kind of red tag to the bull of African men. Some say the word by its very nature is hegemonic or implicitly so. Others find the focus on women in themselves somehow threatening...Some who are genuinely concerned with ameliorating women’s’ lives sometimes feel embarrassed to be described as ‘feminist’... ‘Stiwa’ is my acronym for Social Transformation Including Women in Africa. (as quoted in Kolawole, 2002, p. 95)

In relation to U.S. Black feminism, bell hooks (1984) added,

If one identifies as feminist, it is “translated to mean that one is concerned with no political issues other than feminism.” “When one is black,” identifying as feminist “is likely to be heard as a devaluation of struggle to end racism. Given the fear of being misunderstood, it has been difficult for black women and women in exploited and oppressed ethnic groups to give expression to their interest in feminist concerns.” (p. 31-32)

It is palpable that the term *feminist* is not without controversy, which may in part explain why none of my research participants actually used the terminology; however, Kolawole (2002) affirmed that the introduction of more culturally relevant terms, particularly *African Womanism*, “does not divide the struggle, but increases the diversities and options” (p. 92). Although they maintain the right to self-define their movements, many African scholars would concede that their early resistance to feminism “has softened over time,” (Kolawole, 2002, p. 93).

Not only do Black Transnational Feminists insist upon self-defining and self-naming, they also insist upon setting their own agenda. A demonstration of self-definition is illuminated in Afro-Puerto Rican Santos-Febres’ novel, *Our Lady of the Night*. When the young Afro-Puerto Rican domestic, Isabel, is questioned by her Afro-Puerto Rican teacher, Don Demetrio, about plans for the future she gives a radical answer for the 19th/early 20th century setting of the novel. Isabel declared, “I want to be a woman of means, start my own business.” Don Demetrio responded, “Well, for that you have to find a partner who understands you and respects you.” Isabel combatted, “Oh no, no partners, no kids, nothing. I don’t want to end up having to give up newborns because I can’t support them” (Santos-Febres, 2009, p. 91). Isabel’s declaration is truly impressive given that everything about her current social positioning does not align with her progressive intensions to become an entrepreneur while remaining both spinster and motherless. Even before reading the feminist play that Don Demetrio placed in her hand, Isabel has already begun charting a future for herself that does not include hegemonic notions of womanhood, motherhood, or her prescribed place as a domestic. When asked by Don Demetrio where she had learned such unconventionality, Isabel affirmed, “*I came up with that on my own*” (Santos-Febres, 2009, p. 91).

Just as young Isabel took the liberty to redefine her future in a feminist context, Black Transnational Feminists have renegotiated what *feminism* means to them. One such rearticulation in Black Transnational Feminist thought is to embrace a movement that includes men.

Renegotiating Feminism: A More Inclusive Movement

Related to their distinct needs and values, African women have a difficult time with the exclusionary nature of some western feminist movements. They cannot separate sexism, patriarchy or issues related to gender from larger social concerns that affect all Afro-descendants. For example, poverty and hunger are primary concerns that affect men, women, and children. The same is true for racism, imperialism, and [neo]colonialism. Many Afro-descendants, regardless of gender, must combat one or more of these strongholds. Therefore, it is implausible for Afro-descendants to create a movement for social change that does not include men. The Combahee River Collective of the National Black Feminist Organization (1995) concluded,

Although we are feminists and lesbians, we feel solidarity with progressive black men and do not advocate the fractionalization that white women who are separatists demand. Our situation as black people necessitates that we have solidarity around the fact of race, which white women of course do not need to have with white men, unless it is their negative solidarity as racial oppressors. We struggle together with black men against racism, while we also struggle with black men about sexism. (p. 235)

As expressed by Senegalese feminist Awa Thiam (1986), while women are the most oppressed gender and while many of Africa's social issues affect women to a far greater degree than men, African women have a difficult time joining a movement that excludes men. The value placed on family makes the inclusion of men an optimal choice for Africans and her descendants.

Kolawole (2002) explained that an inclusive movement is also a tactical inevitability in an African context. "Policy changes that will address women's needs cannot succeed if men are alienated. An inclusive approach is a strategic necessity as most policy-makers in many African

countries are men in favour of women” (p. 96). Traveling from Africa to Latin America, the Venezuelan feminist movement soon came to a similar conclusion.

In 2004 Afro-Venezuelan feminists formed the National Cumbe of Afro-Venezuelan Women to provide a space to deliberate women’s concerns. Afro-Venezuelan feminist, Nirva Rosa Camacho Parra (2012), highlighted the tensions that can arise between men and feminist movements when they are viewed as exclusionary. Camacho Parra (2012) reported that Cumbe was received with mixed reviews from men. While some of the men fully understood the purpose of Cumbe and they embraced the work, others saw it as being in opposition to men and did not support it. Although many Black Transnational Feminists recognize the need to have feminist agendas that focus on the lives of women, most seek a balanced approach that also aims to uplift the entire community. Audre Lorde (1995) troubled the notion of a gender-unified movement even further. She proclaimed that the necessity for racial equity among black men and women can become a two-edged sword whereby some black women may disproportionately advocate against racial oppression to the exclusion of sexual oppression. In other words, racial unity within the black community can become antithetical to the fight against gender oppression. According to Lorde (1995),

Because of the continuous battle against racial erasure that black women and black men share, some black women still refuse to recognize that we are also oppressed as women, and that sexual hostility against black women is practiced not only by the white racist society, but implemented within our black communities as well. (p. 288)

Also by way of critique, the Combahee River Collective (1995) acknowledged,

The reaction of black men to feminism has been notoriously negative. They are, of course, even more threatened than black women by the possibility that black feminists might organize around our own needs. They realize that they might not only lose valuable and hard-working allies in their struggles, but that they might also be forced to change their habitually sexist ways of interacting with and oppressing black women. (p. 237)

These analyses reveal that a feminist agenda that includes men does not deify black male dominance as an untouchable theme. In this regard, black feminist Michelle Wallace (1995) criticized white feminists and black feminists alike for taking a “hands off” approach when it came to confronting black male sexism (p. 225). What Black Transnational Feminists seek is equilibrium: a movement that addresses the needs of the community holistically, while also not being afraid to challenge unacceptable patriarchal norms, whether perpetrated by white hands or black ones. One such sexual oppression is the assault on the black female body.

Hegemonic Beauty Standards

Often fueled by sexism and patriarchy, as well as racism, the fight against hegemonic standards of beauty also permeate Black Transnational Feminist discourse. Although white women who do not fit traditional beauty norms are also oppressed by patriarchal and Eurocentric hegemony in media images, an African woman’s race will always cause her to be lacking in a white dominant beauty paradigm. One of the most painful narratives conveyed by Afro-descendant women is the attack on the black body, namely their physical attributes such as their full nose and lips, body types, and hair. According to Hill Collins (2009), “African-American women experience the pain of never being able to live up to the prevailing standards of beauty—standards used by white men, white women, black men, and, most painfully, one another” (p. 98).

Afro-Dominican author of *Geographies of Home*, Loida Maritza Pérez, dichotomizes the concept of black masculinity with white hegemonic beauty paradigms which disproportionately affect black women. In the novel *Beatriz*, the most beautiful of her sisters, and arrogantly so, ridiculed the sister she considered the biggest threat, Marina. Beatriz remarked that “no one would ever consider [Marina] attractive. Not with her baboon nose and nigger lips” (Pérez, 1999, p. 42). Gabriel, who is Iliana, Marina, and Beatriz’s brother, gave a stereotypical characterization of the black woman. “He accused black women of being the ugliest, loudest and most

demanding” (Pérez, 1999, p. 107). In a show of poetic justice, Gabriel marries Laurie, a white woman, who later sleeps with his brother and as a result is loathed by his family. Iliana felt “he deserved it after years of craving a white woman” (Pérez, p. 107, 1999). Laurie, on the other hand, suffered greatly from internalized superiority.

Demonstrating the politics of hair, while on the train, Laurie insults an innocent black woman who has the misfortune of being seated beside her. Laurie deliberately flips her hair so that it will hit the woman in her face repeatedly. When the black woman grows tired of Laurie’s assault and verbally confronts her, Laurie responds, “Damned kinky-headed bitch! Probably jealous of my hair” (Pérez, p. 108, 1999)! The novel consistently reveals denigrations of the black woman and multiple characters place themselves in opposition to the black woman. Although both Gabriel and Marina are black Dominicans, they too subscribe to white hegemonic notions of beauty. In her research on Dominican women in New York hair salons, Ginetta Candelario (2000) wrote, “Confronted in New York City with the U.S. model of pure whiteness that valorizes lank, light hair, white skin, light eyes, thin and narrow-hipped bodies, the Dominican staff and clients at Salon Lamadas continue to prefer a whiteness that indicates mixture” (p. 130).

It is clear that by Gabriel’s derogatory references to black women’s disposition, voice, and beauty, Beatriz’s comment about Marina’s full nose and lips, and Laurie’s use of the black woman’s hair as a point of deprecation show that Perez is deliberate in her attempt to expose the Dominicans’ acceptance of white mainstream standards of beauty while juxtaposed with stereotypical black vilifications.

When Candelario (2000) asked her Dominican participants to rate photographs from prettiest to least pretty, “there were no *white* women among the women perceived as *least pretty*. Instead ... the women considered *least pretty* were those African diaspora women furthest away from [the] standard Hispanic-looking woman” (p. 145).

Like Candelaria's research unearthed, in Melva Román's short story, *Del Montón*, the mother protagonist realizes that she has entered her daughters into a beauty contest that is rigged by historical markers that run deeper than her daughters' cuteness can combat. The mother soon notices that only blond girls with colored eyes win the trophies. According to the mother,

Me pareció que estaba en las competencias equivocadas, y que lo único que buscaban eran niñas rubias y de ojos verdes, azules, o grises, qué más da, pero rubias. Me molestó ver que aquello parecía un matadero de niñas donde sacrificaba a veinte para endiosar a una. (Román, 1999, p. 37)

It seemed to me that I was in the wrong competition and the only thing they were looking for were blond girls with green, blue, or grey eyes, but most importantly, blonds. It bothered me to see that this competition appeared to be a slaughterhouse of little girls where they sacrificed twenty to make a goddess out of one.

Just as Román soon learned the value of whiteness in Puerto Rican society, Ghanaian stiwaniist Aidoo (1995) found a similar trend in beauty contests on the African continent.

When [an African woman] goes to the beauty contest and sees the judges selecting a light-skinned, straight-haired woman, she realizes the extent of their colonization because the judges select on the basis of what the majority of Africans *are not*---in this case light-skinned and straight hair. (p. 132)

No matter how secluded she may be, the moment a girl of African descent is introduced to western media and sees the prototype white beauty, an image that she can never attain, it is clear to her that she has been tossed into a fight that has already been fixed. Fighting dominant images of beauty and internalized inferiority become a central item on the Black Transnational Feminist's agenda.

According to Hill Collins (2000),

Prevailing standards of beauty claim that no matter how intelligent, educated, or "beautiful" a black woman may be, those black women whose features and skin color are most African must "git back." With the binary thinking that underpins intersecting oppressions, blue-eyed, blond, thin white women could not be considered beautiful

without the Other—black women with African features of dark skin, broad noses, full lips, and kinky hair. (p. 89)

Latina feminist, Ginetta Candelario (2000), who has published extensively on Afro-Dominican women argued,

With the rise of global colonialism, slavery, neocolonialism, and imperialism, African-origin bodies have been stigmatized as unsightly and ugly, yet, simultaneously and paradoxically as hypersexual. [According to Young, 1995] the white supremacist racial history interacts with masculinist imperatives of gender and sexual homogenization and normalization in particular ways. (p. 129)

Regardless of her credentials, Afro-Panamanian Yvette Modestín learned that she is “immediately placed at a disadvantage because of the color of [her] skin” (as cited in Bonilla-Silva, 2004, p. 932). After residing in the United States, Modestín (2010) made the unpopular decision to “go natural,” meaning that she no longer “processed or colored” her hair for the purpose of having a straight head of hair (p. 420). Modestín soon learned that image matters not only in the media, but also in the Latin@ community.

When I cut all my hair off and went natural, my Latina friends were appalled. I felt the reactions of disgust from some people. For me it represents a sense of freedom and a confidence in one’s internal and external beauty that only those who exhibit it with pride can understand. (p. 420)

Modestín’s choice to “go natural” was a first step in renegotiating the practice of blanqueamiento (whitening); however, her decision was quite controversial and misunderstood amongst her Latina counterparts, revealing a need for enlightened dialogue on dominant beauty standards as well as our hegemonic acquiescence to such paradigms. Similar to the rejection experienced by Modestín, a black Panamanian girl was recently dismissed from a Panamanian school for breaking their policy of wearing her natural hair in braids. Afro-Panamanian scholar Lowe de Goodin (2012) wrote, “La alumna que recibe un regaño o una burla por sus maestros

por la forma natural de su cabello sufrirá los efectos de esta experiencia negativa, probablemente por el resto de su vida” (p. 112). *The female student who receives scorn or teasing by her teachers for the natural form of her hair will suffer the effects of this negative experience probably for the rest of her life.* Instead of imposing discriminatory regulations upon afro-descendants and scrutinizing our physical attributes. Lowe de Goodin (2012) suggested putting more emphasis into offering a quality education.



Figure 2. *Day of the Braids*. Translation of protest flyer: Mom, why can't I wear braids to school? Day of the Braids| Panama May 21, 2012 Organizers: National Coordinator of Black Panamanian Organizations

According to Afro-Puerto Rican, Rivera Lassén (2012), her earliest memories of feminist thought revolved around standards of beauty. She reported being assaulted with both white aesthetics and the “traditional” upbringing for a Latina girl of her time in the 1960s. When looking in the mirror, Rivera Lassén (2012) explained, “For a black person, the acceptance or blackness of our skin, the kinkiness of our hair, the width of our nose and the thickness of our lips have meanings that go beyond aesthetics; they have economic, political and social implications” (p. 68). Correspondingly, Candelario noted (2000), “The degrees, types, and technologies of artifice and alteration required by beauty are mediated by racial, sexual, class, political, and geographic cultures and locations” (p. 128).

Negative Portrayals of Women of African Descent

One bullet that continues to surface on many Black Transnational Feminist agendas revolves around dominant portrayals of Afro-descendant women. Lesbian Havana Feminist Rappers, Las Krudas, are a remarkable example of grassroots activists who seek social justice on behalf of Afro-Cuban women. They perform in the streets of Havana as a protest to being excluded and misrepresented by established theatres and concert halls in Cuba. Las Krudas member Pelusa explained,

We do our own [performances], where the black woman has the role of protagonist; because the rest of the time in Cuban theater it's not that way. [Black women play] the classic role of slaves, servants, domestics, of long-suffering women, housewives. We have never had the possibility to have plays where the black woman is protagonist and her life is a victory. Entiendes? Understand? So then, we, through our theater projects try to grow the size of the black woman. (p. 108)

Patricia Hill Collins (2000) also takes up the image of the black woman as a social justice issue. "Portraying African-American women as stereotypical mammies, matriarchs, welfare recipients, and hot mommas helps justify U.S. black women's oppression. Challenging these core images has long been a core theme in Black Feminist Thought" (p. 69). Afro-Puerto Rican, Cruz-Janzen (2001), has also taken up the cause of the black woman's image as primary to her feminist agenda in relaying her childhood narrative.

In middle school, also in Puerto Rico, for a school play I was assigned the role of a house servant. Only children of black heritage played the slaves and servants. A white student with a painted face portrayed the only significant black character; all the other characters were white. I learned then that nonwhites could not represent the nation's greatness but could only serve as servants and slaves to the great white leaders. (p. 176-177)

In addition to challenging dominant beauty standards and dominant matrices of servitude, Afro-descendant women also call for a movement that incorporates other social justice concerns.

Renegotiating Feminism: A Call to Respond to Other 'isms

In alignment with CRT's intersections with other forms of oppression, Black Transnational Feminism equally seeks to obliterate the gender binary by focusing on other '*isms*. "To the African woman, many forms of oppression exist around her simultaneously" (Kolawole, 1997, p. 12). Hierarchically speaking, some African descendant women do not feel that patriarchy is their main enemy and certainly not their sole enemy. In a later publication, Kolawole (2002) explained,

The number of national, tribal, and ethnic groups is as important as race, colonial experience, post-colonialism, neo-colonialism, apartheid, military rule, culture, tradition, religion, modernity and much more recently globalization. All these factors impact on African women's reality in particular ways. (p. 92)

Although from two distinct parts of the world, the voices of Nigerian feminist Kolawole and African-American feminist bell hooks synergistically call for a more inclusive feminism that integrates other '*isms*. In her definition of feminism, bell hooks (1984) also acknowledged that other social issues must be incorporated into feminist agendas. Hooks (1984) wrote, "...Race and class [should] be recognized as feminist issues with as much relevance as sexism" (p. 27). Black Transnational Feminists call for a more inclusive feminist agenda that ruptures the male/female binary. Similarly, Latino scholar Juan Perea (2000) indicted us all for being characters on the black/white binary stage.

Renegotiating CRT: A Rebuke of Binaries

While Black Transnational Feminists are calling for heightened visibility and a serious commitment to race as well as other '*isms*, Latino Critical Race scholar, Juan Perea (2000), gave a heartfelt rebuke of the often exclusive dyadic racial paradigm inherent in CRT scholarship. According to Perea (2000), "Many scholars of race reproduce this paradigm when they write and act as though only the black and the white race matter for purposes of discussing race and social

policy” (p. 346). Perea’s (2000) insights are admonitory. Of the Latino, Perea (2000) acknowledged, “Latinos/as participate in the paradigm by engaging in racism against blacks or darker skinned members of Latino/a communities” (p. 350). The pervasiveness of the black-white binary even within the Latino community follows in the narrative of Afro-Panamanian scholar, Yvette Modestín (2010). While attending a conference in North Carolina, Modestín noted a Central American accent and introduced herself to a Honduran conference attendee. When Modestín (2010) stated, “Somos vecinos” (we’re neighbors), the Honduran woman responded, “Oh, I thought you were a black woman” (p. 419). Modestín questioned the woman’s ignorance given that 50% of Hondurans are also of African descent. Although the Honduran woman readily noticed Modestín’s race, she did not consider the possibility that she could be *both black and Latina*, but instead bought into the *either/or* binary.

In their direct response to Perea’s (2000) article, LatCrit theorist Leslie Espinosa and African-American Critical Race Scholar Angela Harris (2000) went a little deeper in their interrogation of the complex realities of race in the United States. They simultaneously acknowledged the dual racial binary that is often at play. African American co-author Harris (2000) explained, “But in American social life, the operation of day-to-day white supremacy has always depended principally on color prejudice, which in turn, has been most centrally associated with anti-black prejudice” (p. 442). Harris’s Latina co-author, Espinosa, questioned,

Who is more “exceptional”? When we ask that question, we are buying into the hierarchical system that oppresses us. Latinos/as are seen as immigrant interlopers; Blacks are seen as intractable criminals. Does it really matter if resistance is met with deportation or with imprisonment? The important questions are: “What is the nature of our oppression? Who benefits by it? And, how can we resist it” (p. 446). In a subsequent section I will present whiteness as property as one response to Espinosa’s query, ‘Who benefits from our oppression’ (p. 446)?

Perea (2000), Harris and Espinosa (2000) make salient arguments both for and against the appropriateness of the black/white binary in a Latin@ context. Whereas some scholars admonish against the black/white binary, others call for a more balanced presentation of Latin@ ethno-racial heritage. With respect to Latin@s, many scholars feel that researchers have overlooked race and thereby perpetuate both Afro-Latin@ invisibility as well as white supremacy. What is the appropriate balance?

I believe the goal of the researcher should be to interrogate how race, class, and gender impact the lives of Latin@s, while simultaneously being open to co-constructing something new, something that is fluid, porously bordered, and free of binary limitations. One strategy to achieve this is to conduct research that allows underrepresented voices to relay their own experiences. Although the researcher is charged with analyzing the narratives, s/he must remain faithful to the voices of the participants. In the case of dissertation study, the analysis should occur within a transnational milieu; a transnational context that acknowledges that a U.S. model may not fully capture the complexities of Latin@ identity construction.

Colorblind Racism

Building upon Harris and Espinosa's (2000) arguments, another tenet of CRT is the *ordinariness of racism*. The banality of racism continues to go unacknowledged by the privileged populace of most Latin American countries. However, my research reveals that those most disenfranchised by Latin American racism are typically aware of the ordinariness of racism both in their home countries and in the United States. I would offer that although racial constructs and their consequences are very much alive in Latin America, *[colorblind]racism* as an oppressive practice and a social/historical reality has yet to be owned by most Latino nations. Colorblind racism allows Latin@s to deny the existence of race, racism, or both. Clémentine Animann Akassi

(2010), Director of the Center of African and African Diaspora Studies at Howard University explained,

El colorblind es pues construir discursos racistas y negarse a “verlos” así pública y oficialmente ya que las voces autorizadas y de autoridad/coerción los prohíben implícita o explícitamente. La consecuencia de ello es que el colorblind informa el racismo ordinario sin que haya ninguna posibilidad de debate sobre la cuestión. (p. 23)

Colorblind racism is to construct racist discourses and then deny “seeing” them publically and officially since the authorized voices and voices of authority/coercion prohibit them implicitly or explicitly. The consequence of it is that colorblind racism informs ordinary racism without there being the possibility of debate about the issue.

Latin America continues to be afflicted by colorblind racism: a concomitant denial that neither race nor racism exists. According to Rose (1994) “Despite the official, government proclamations of fairness, economic opportunity, social mobility, and racial equality, inequity is the rule for most black Cubans” (as quoted in Armstead, 2007, p. 106). Afro Puerto Rican Cruz-Janzen (2001) refers to [the] pattern of Latin@ denial of black ancestry as “the most blatant manifestation of Latin@ racism” (pg. 176), a type of racism that she terms “historical amnesia” (pg. 174). Cruz-Janzen (2001) offered a powerful analogy, ‘Latinegras represent the mirrors that most Latinos would like to shatter because they reflect the blackness Latinos don't want to see in themselves’ (p. 168).

Priestley (2007) indicts the tendency of researchers in the U.S. academe (Kauffman, 2003; Contreras, 2004) to downplay racial constructs when related to Afro-Latinos. Of Contreras (2004), Priestley wrote,

Cognizant that “Latino” as a category is problematic in that it includes people of different classes, religions, ethnicities, and “races,” Contreras, nevertheless, asserts that Hispanic/Latino identity should be constructed without reference to race. Ironically, having once argued that Latinos were made invisible by the black-white binary, Contreras now proposes to make Afro-Latinos invisible. (Priestley, 2006. p. 57)

In agreement with Priestley (2007), Afro-Puerto Rican Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2004) warned, “This kinder form of white supremacy has produced an accompanying ideology: the ideology of color-blind racism. This ideology denies the salience of race, scorns those who talk about race, and increasingly proclaims, that *We are all Americans*” (p. 934). Since Bonilla-Silva (2004) contends that the acceptance of national identity in lieu of racial identity is already prevalent in many Latin American countries; he termed the emerging U.S. phenomenon as the *Latin Americanization* of the United States.

Like most other Latin American feminists, the Afro-Venezuelans were faced with the difficulty of combating an unacknowledged *ism* called racism in “a society that considers itself non-racist and egalitarian” (Camacho Parra, 2012, p. 4). Early in the Afro-feminist Union’s work from 1991-1992, the organizers tried to bring awareness to the fact that there existed a black community in Venezuela that had a unique history, culture, and experiences. Another mission of the Union was to “expose the existence of racial discrimination in mass media and nightclubs” (Camacho Parra, 2012, p. 5).

Afro-Venezuelan, Laurent-Perrault (2010) found a dire need to educate both U.S. Americans and U.S. Latin@s on the experiences of Afro-Latin@s. Laurent-Perrault (2010) shared a narrative of geopolitics whereby she continued the conversation on U.S. soil that Camacho Parra (2012) concluded on Venezuelan soil. Upon immigrating to Philadelphia, Laurent-Perrault (2010) felt the lack of awareness and the misinformation presented on Afro-Latinos came from a variety of sources including colonialism, United States media, and the “tremendous lack of information and silence about African heritage” in Latin America (Laurent-Perrault, 2010, p. 93). In Philadelphia, it was evident that Afro-Latin@s wanted and needed a space where they could contest the ignorance surrounding their history and culture. “They wanted a space that could unmask the lie that Latina communities were free of prejudice and

discrimination” (Laurent-Perrault, 2010, p. 93). With respect to Cuba, Aguirre and Bonilla-Silva (2002) concurred with Laurent-Perrault. They stated, “Indeed, a cloud of misrepresentations surrounds the matter of race relations in the island, not only among Cubans in Cuba but also among Cubans in the United States” (p. 311). Aguirre and Bonilla-Silva’s (2002) conclusions demonstrate that racial illusions and sentiments migrate from home countries to host countries.

I would like to disrupt yet another binary: *Us (U.S.) vs. them* or rather The United States’ perceived obsession with the construction of race versus the colorblindness of other nations. For example, Afro-Mexican, Dr. Rosario María Jackson (2010) reported, “When I was a small child, my [Mexican] mother used to claim that there was no racism in Mexico—everyone was Mexican. *It was not like the United States, obsessed with race and categories*” (p. 435). Based on discourse analysis, I would argue that race is also a socially real category as evidenced by the Spanish language lexicon.

Referring to a U.S. context, Mempel (2001) offered, “[T]here are a variety of terms that have been used to refer specifically to mixed race people including mulatto, octoroon, half-breed, and half-caste” (as quoted by Bettez, 2012, p. 28). Relatedly, my interest was piqued regarding some of the racialized terms found in Latin America. This interest was birthed after my field notes and transcripts revealed that each of the six Afro-Latinas that I interviewed during my pilot study referenced racialized terms. Three of the participants straightway charged me to research the language that is used in Latin America to describe African descendants. During the dissertation research, current participants echoed the same concern. A linguistic approach, or what Gee (2005) calls discourse analysis, focuses on the language of the story or the spoken text (Merriam, 2009, p. 33). The study participants were adamant that if I performed discourse analysis I would find that racial categorization is alive and thriving in Latin America. Heeding the voices of the participants, my exploration began.

My research has revealed a pervasive Spanish lexicon that employs dozens of adjectives that overtly highlight skin tone and physical characteristics, embedded in the descriptors are references to class, regions, historical context and other social and historical categories. I contend that physical features are one of many variables in determining race in Latin America, *even if officially unacknowledged by the masses*. To lend credence to this point, I have conducted a linguistic analysis of a phenotypic lexicon found in the Spanish vernacular. Many of the terms used have etymologically evolved whereby in today's vernacular they inoffensively denote innocuous physical characteristics such as skin tone or hair color (*moreno*, *trigueño*). Others, however, denote and/or connote servitude or the exoticized other (*chinito*). Some reveal the regional isolation or locations of the African descendants resulting from slavery and they refer to the locale where slave ships docked (*costeño*, *isleño*) while others stem from animalistic and/or derogatory origins (*lobo*, *coyote*, *trompudito*). Other terms highlight racial impurity (Fox, 2007) such as *zambo*, *mestizo*, and *pardo*. Additionally, other factors must be considered when rendering discourse analysis.

Just as the terms may have evolved etymologically, they also may bear different meanings in different Spanish-speaking countries (regionalisms). As with all language, linguistic register is important, meaning that context matters when deciphering the meanings associated with a given expression. All things considered, these examples demonstrate the salience of racial terminology and racial categorization found in the Spanish lexis as well as their often associated connotations. This discourse analysis in addition to the subsequent narratives prove that within Latino spaces, race is a socially real category and not as colorblind as some may insinuate. According to Amaro & Zambrana (2000),

Racial identification among Latinos in the United States is also likely to be influenced by the ongoing discourse on changes in racial constructions in Central and South America

and the Caribbean...as evidenced in the terms *criollo*, *mestizo*, *mulato*, *latiNegra*, *Afro-Latino*, and *indígena*. (p. 1725)

Arturo Fox (2007) gave a colonial overview of the origin and meanings associated with certain racialized terms that are still in use today.

Castas eran distintas categorías de mezcla racial...*mulato*, por ejemplo, aludía a la mezcla de blanco y de negro; *zambo*, a la de indígena y negro; ...algunos con nombres ofensivos, como *lobo*, *coyote*, o *no te entiendo*. En general, cualquier tipo de mezcla racial conllevaba una posición de inferioridad en la escala social. Los *mestizos* (europeo e indígena) no tenían acceso, por ejemplo, a las universidades ni a casi ningún puesto menor de la Iglesia o de la burocracia colonial, tampoco podían ser oficiales del ejército, y si trabajaban en los talleres de artesanos se les permitía ser aprendices pero no maestros. Las restricciones eran todavía más severas para *los mulatos*, *zambos*, y *negros libres*, a quienes se les prohibía, entre otras cosas, portar armas. (p. 78)

Castes were different categories of racial mixing...*mulatto*, for example, alluded to the mixture of white and black, *zambo*, referring to Indian and black; some names were offensive like *wolf*, *coyote*, or *I don't understand you./What are you?* In general, any type of racial mixture carried with it a position of inferiority with respect to social class. The *mestizos* (European and Indian) did not have access, for example, to universities, nor to any minor post of the Catholic church or the colonial bureaucracy, neither could they be military officials, and if they worked in artisan workshops they were permitted to be apprentices but not teachers. The restrictions were even more severe for *mulattos*, *zambos* and *free blacks*, who were prohibited, among other things, from carrying weapons.

Shifting from colonialism to present-day, Afro-Mexican, Dr. Rosario María Jackson (2010), the daughter of an African-American father and a Mexican mother described her relationship with the aforementioned lexicon.

[When visiting] Mexico City, walking through the markets...I was called *chata*, *chinita*, *trompudita*, and *morena*---all racial terms, though said with affection I think. I looked somewhat distinct from most people in Mexico City, but not completely unfamiliar: "*parece costeñita*," (You look like you're from the coast) people would say. People would talk to me in fake costeño accents and I didn't understand why. They claimed me as Mexican, but they viewed me as a curiosity that belonged at the periphery of the nation (p. 435).

Of her experience with these terms in Puerto Rico, Cruz Janzen (2001) reported,

Latinegras are marked by a cruel, racialized history because of the shades of their skin, the colors and shapes of their eyes, and the textures and hues of their hair. They are the darkest *negras*, *morenas*, and *prietas*, the brown and golden *cholas* and *mulatas*, and the wheat-colored *trigueñas*. They are the light-skinned *jabas* with black features and the *grifas* with white looks but whose hair defiantly announces their ancestry. They are the Spanish-looking *criollas*, and the *pardas* and *zambas* who carry indigenous blood. (168)

Although I fully concede that it is problematic to impose a U.S. racial system on Latin@s, I caution researchers against U.S. American exceptionalism whereby the U.S. is presented as the sole perpetrator of racial binaries and racial categorizations. Although denied, unspoken, and masked in most Latin American countries, racial constructs---as fashioned by Latin@s according to history, geography, geopolitics, power, privilege, oppression, and phenotype---exist and permeate Latin America from Mexico to the Southern Cone. Granted there are rarely any race-based census boxes to check in most instances in Latin America, this discourse analysis as well as Jackson (2010) and Cruz Janzen's (2001) first-person published narratives reveal that the boxes that distinguish one's race and ethnicity are checked each time one of the above-mentioned terms is ascribed.

One of the first negotiations that I had to confront as a researcher was to adjust my historical lens. Given that I was reared in the United States where the black/white binary is a pervasive means to classify race based on the one-drop rule, my lens was tunneled. Like other researchers (Gates; Simmons; Bonilla-Silva) before me, I too began to Americanize Latin America's construction of race based on a U.S. paradigm. It became clear that my U.S. western gaze did not always reflect the historical, racial, and social complexities of Latino identity formation.

Construction of Race in the United States

Given the United States' preoccupation with white property rights, historically few people have been allowed to claim whiteness. However, based on shifting political aims of the day, racial identity has always been fluid and ambiguously defined. "When people encounter new racial systems they have to *negotiate* "who they are" and what they are perceived to be within this new context. This often involves making sense of the categories and racialization in that particular place" (Simmons, 2009, p. 68). Defining race in the United States has always been a thorny thistle in U.S. politics. Being that "race is "historically contingent and socially constructed," and given that historical context and social constructs are ever-changing, the definition of race has always been capricious at best. A primary tenet of Critical Race Theory is *interest convergence* whereby the powerful elite yield to minority interests only when it benefits them. Historically, definitions of race have always benefited the elite majority.

During slavery, several key pieces of legislation called racial definitions into question. The federal government often adhered to the *hypodescent rule*, more commonly termed the *one-drop rule*, which defines blackness as follows: "any visible admixture of black blood stamps the person as belonging to the colored race" (Gómez, 2007, p. 145). Of course, there are serious flaws in this definition given that visible physical characteristics may betray an observer, possibly leading to an erroneous racialization. Recognizing the deficiency, the Supreme Court allowed individual states and local governments to determine and enforce definitions of race.

Along with interest convergence, a primary foundation of CRT is the culpability of the U.S. legal system that perpetuates, sustains, and supports racial inequities. A commonly accepted definition during slavery was that the race of the mother determined the race of the child. Obviously, it would not serve the interests of the elite to allow paternity to determine race given the number of white slave holders who bore children by their enslaved property.

Following the slave era, racial definitions continued to fluctuate in the United States. During the revolutionary era, blackness was determined if one was found to be at least one quarter or more of African descent, meaning that s/he had at least one black grandparent. Transitioning into the 1850s through the 1890s, representing pre-civil war through reconstruction, census enumerators used creative license to determine African descent. They counted “mulattoes, quadroons, and octoroons at various times” as black, “attesting both to the prevalence of black/white mixing and to the existence of competing state and local definitions” (Gómez, 2009, p. 95). In 1896, Homer Plessy’s legal team orchestrated a case that would challenge the one-drop rule, which was typically enforced by simply assigning race based on appearance: a categorization that varied from state to state, and from observer to observer. Plessy was seven-eighths white and he appeared white to almost all. So much so that his lawyers had to *arrange* for him to be arrested while seated in the whites-only section of a stage car, without which no one would have questioned his whiteness. Plessy was white in appearance but lived his life according to the one-drop rule; he was fully engaged in the black community of New Orleans and was active in civil rights work. He opted not to live a life of passing. His lawyers thought Plessy was an ideal test case to Jim Crow given his racial ambiguity. In essence, they argued that since race was socially constructed, the hypodescent rule was too faulty and too subjective of a measure to be a reliable determinant. The high court basically agreed but refused to strike down the law, thereby not only leaving the matter to the states to decide, but also “giving the green light to state and local governments to pass Jim Crow laws” resulting in “the proliferation of anti-black segregation statutes across the nation and in virtually every aspect of social life” (Gómez, 2009, p. 94-95). According to Telles (2004) “The hypodescent rule under which one drop of black ancestry defines black status was the result and eventually emerged as the American rule by about 1930” (as cited by Gómez, 2009, p. 95).

Occurring in 1897, the first case to test what Gómez (2009) called the *reverse one-drop rule*, was Mexican national Ricardo Rodríguez, going to trial just one year following the Plessy vs. Ferguson trial. Rodríguez claimed he was white and hence worthy of U.S. citizenship. The judge in the case first judged Rodríguez' whiteness based on the "common sense test," meaning *did he look white* (Gómez, 2009, p. 96). To which the judge found that Rodríguez' "copper-colored or red" complexion and "dark eyes, straight black hair and high cheek bones" surmised that he was not white in appearance (as cited by Gómez, 2009, p. 96). The next criteria used was the scientific approach, meaning, how would scientists and anthropologists classify Rodríguez. To this end the judge found, "If the strict scientific classification of the anthropologist should be adopted, he would probably not be classed as white" (Gómez, 2007, p. 141). Although either one of these tests would have made Rodríguez ineligible for U.S. citizenship, the judge ultimately concluded that Rodríguez was "white enough" (Gómez, 2009, p. 96). It is paradoxical to note that the Texas judge found that Rodríguez' features were inconsistent with the white race according to "common sense" as well as anthropological standards of the day. Meanwhile Homer Plessy's characteristics were absolutely congruent with the same set of codes, not to mention he was U.S. born and 7/8 white, but still yet Plessy was not granted access to the benefits of whiteness. Although this section is not an exhaustive summary of the construction of race in the United States, it incorporates many of the most often cited historical events. Bonilla-Silva (2004) found,

Those on the nonwhite side of the divide (blacks, Native Americans, Asians, and Latinos) have shared similar experiences of colonialism, oppression, exploitation, and racialization. Hence, being nonwhite has meant having restricted access to the multiple 'wages of whiteness' (Roediger, 1991) such as good housing, decent jobs, and a good education. (p. 932)

Due to the increased colorization of the United States, or what some term the browning/darkening of the nation, Bonilla-Silva (2004) attempted to analyze current racial trends.

Bonilla-Silva's Tri-Racial Regime

Bonilla-Silva's (2004) research supports the notion of white and light-skinned privilege. He sees little distinction between the tri-racial system enacted in the Caribbean and that of the United States. Bonilla-Silva (2004) hypothesized that due to the darkening of the United States, the nation is shifting from its historical bi-racial binary of black and white to a "complex and loosely organized" tri-racial regime (p. 932). Similar to the Latin American and Caribbean stratification system, Bonilla-Silva (2004) theorized that the United States will experience a tri-racial system (see chart below) in which "whites" will be at the top, "Honorary whites" will be in the middle, and lastly "Collective blacks" will occupy the bottom stratum (p. 932). Although the above mentioned categories may either be sub/consciously self-selected or assigned, *honorary* does not imply equality. "One's standing and status [especially that of 'Honorary' white] will be dependent upon whites' wishes and practices" (p. 944), or what CRT classes as *interest convergence*.

<p>“Whites”</p> <p>Whites New Whites (Russians, Albanians, etc.) Assimilated white Latinos Some multiracials Assimilated (urban) Native Americans A few Asian-origin people</p>
<p>“Honorary Whites”</p> <p>Light-skinned Latinos Japanese Americans Korean Americans Asian Indians Chinese Americans Middle Eastern Americans Most multiracials Filipino Americans</p>
<p>“Collective Black”</p> <p>Vietnamese Americans Hmong Americans Laotian Americans Dark-skinned Latinos Blacks New West Indian and African immigrants Reservation-bound Native Americans</p>

Figure 3. From Bi-Racial to Tri-Racial: Preliminary Map of Tri-Racial System in the USA. (Bonilla-Silva, 2004)

The 2010 U.S. Census data supports Bonilla-Silva’s (2004) theory in that it reveals a propensity towards whiteness on behalf of Latin@ immigrants. According to McClain et al. (2006), 78.3% of Latin@ respondents of Durham, NC reported having more in common with whites than blacks. Similarly, the 2010 U.S. Census reported that Latin@s were far more likely to identify their race as white (53%), or as a combination of races (36.7%) whereas only 2.5% identified as black. In contrast, Kaufmann (2003) found that 50% of Puerto Rican and 39% of Dominican immigrants reported greater similarities with African-Americans. Some 33% of Latin@s felt an affinity for both blacks and whites. One could conclude that darker-skinned Puerto Ricans and Dominicans, many of African descent, connected more intimately with African-Americans (p. 203). This

connection may also be attributable to the racially segregated communities in which African-Americans and Afro-Latin@s often reside as well as outside racialization tendencies.

The tri-racial hypothesis, or the Latin Americanization of the U.S. racial stratum, does incorporate the analysis and intersections of colorblind racism, new racism, class, intermarriage, outmarriage and dating practices, segregation, pigmentocracy, colorism, and social mobility. Bonilla-Silva's (2004) theorizing opens the doors to other inquiries of social categories. Multiple identities are constantly overlapping with race. For example, although Bonilla-Silva (2004) placed light skinned Latin@s in the *Honorary White* category, is there a distinction between light skinned Latin@s who are naturalized and those who are not, or those who speak English and those who do not, or those who are wealthy and those who are not? Bonilla-Silva's (2004) broad categorizations leave little room for interrogations such as those aforementioned. In concert with my observation, Bonilla-Silva (2004) admitted,

I recognize that my thesis is *broad* (attempting to classify where everyone will fit in the racial order), *bold* (making a prediction about the future of race relations), and *hard to verify empirically with the available data* (there is no data set that includes systematic data on the skin tone of all Americans). (p. 933)

Given his acknowledgement of these limitations, I am sure that this foundational work will evolve to address some of the gaps cited above.

Another gap in the analysis is that racial groups are often presented as homogenous. Bonilla-Silva (2004) would agree that more depth is needed to properly analyze subgroups. He stated, "Most of the data is not parceled out by subgroups and there is limited information by skin tone,[therefore] it is hard to make a conclusive case for Latin Americanization" (Bonilla-Silva, 2004, p. 941). Given the complexity of intra-group modalities some of the classifications may be overly simplified. For example, who represents the subcategory of *most multiracials* in Bonilla-Silva's analysis? Not only are the descriptors such as *multiracials* and others left undefined, many

are understood to be defined within a U.S. racial system, a system that may not account for certain inter and intra-group nuances. For example, in a U.S. context, “The term *mixed*...is generally used for a person with direct mixed parentage” (Simmons, 2009, p. 70). This distinction is not the case in many Latin American countries. “Dominican mixture is expressed as being betwixt and between black and white—it isn’t black *or* white—but rather *indio*, *mestizo*, and/or now *mulatto*” (Simmons, 2009, p. 70) and often extends beyond parentage to include multiple generations of ancestral lineage. As the nation continues to darken, Bonilla-Silva’s (2004) tri-racial hypothesis offers insightful conclusions while raising significant questions of the Latin Americanization of U.S. racial categories. I estimate in the future that the analysis will be expanded to unpack some of the established categories and broad conclusions in greater detail.

Construction of Race in Latin America

In the United States race was historically constructed to preserve the rigid categorization of two racial groups: blacks and whites. Moreover, since whites had the power to brand and to enforce labels under presumption of law, such categorizations were always in their favor. Within the U.S. construct of race, to preserve white property rights we see waves of fluidity whereby blacks, some immigrants, and some exoticized others are relegated to blackness; however, when it serves the interests of the majority, certain groups are permitted access into the white category. At its core, this is what Bonilla-Silva’s (2004) racial order is attempting to explicate. Consequently, underserved communities in the United States fought to break through the glass ceilings of whiteness to access privileges historically denied them, such as voting, education, public access, equal housing, employment, and much more. In many Latin American countries, the construction of race has not paralleled that of the United States.

Admittedly this is a difficult comparison given that the United States is only one country and the Spanish-speaking Latin America is made up of over 20 countries and the Commonwealth

of Puerto Rico. To narrow this presentation, I will offer a brief overview of some racial variables indicative of the three countries addressed in this study: Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and Panama. The subsequent section on the history of the Dominican Republic reveals that due to historical conflicts that arose from both sides of Hispaniola Dominicans came to view themselves in contrast to Haiti and to all things Haitian: including blackness. However, recognizing their *mestizaje* (mixtures), Latin@s did not come to readily classify themselves as white either. They adopted an *inbetweenness* whereby they most often identify with racially conflated categories such as *indi@* or *mulat@*. In the Dominican, citizens receive a *cédula*, or identification card that lists typical identifiers including race. The race is determined by the *cédula* official. Although citizens can self-select their identities, the official must agree with their determination. There are five racial categories on the *cédula*: *blanc@* (typically white or extremely light skinned with straight hair and colored eyes), *indi@* (default for any light skinned, brown, or black Dominican), *mulat@* (ambiguous category still not clearly defined), *negr@* (Dominico-Haitian), and *amarill@* (Asian-Dominican). The *cédula* is a complex naming process not solely based on skin tone, but also hair texture and eye color (Candelario, 2007, 2001). By far, *indi@* is the default term that most prefer. *Indi@* is the most widely assigned since many do not wish to be identified as *negr@*, a term often reserved for Haitians. *Mulat@* is an uncommon categorization since it is a very new category on the Dominican *cédula*. There are many gradients of the *indi@* category including *indi@ clar@* (light [brown] skin) or *indi@ oscur@* (dark [brown] skin) which are used in everyday vernacular, but these gradients are not listed as part of the *cédula* (Simmons, 2009).

These racial categories reveal interesting data. *Indi@* does not necessarily represent Native Americanness to the vast majority of Dominicans. It is important to note that *indi@* may not denote a particular color either, but rather a wide range that includes color degradations from blackness to brownness, kind of a catch-all category. This is the category most often selected on

the *cédula* by officials and it is also the preference of most Dominicans. “Even when people [are] dark-skinned” they are consistently categorized as *indi@s* (Simmons, 2009, p. 47). Given the social stigma of the term *negr@*, few elect this identity from either side of the *cédula* desk; however, when someone does opt to be classified as *negr@*, who is not Haitian, “the negro category and self-definition is a form of resistance in opposition to *indio*” (Simmons, 2009, p. 48).

Moving from the Dominican Republic to Guatemala, English (2006) explained Guatemala’s racial paradigms. “In Central America, the Garífuna are generally poor, with low levels of literacy, and usually participate in the lower levels of major institutions of Central American society” (as cited by Rodríguez and Menjívar, 2009, p. 191). Garífuna communities in Guatemala have remained historically underserved and isolated from main stream Guatemalans. Since they are not native to Guatemala, speak a distinct language, are of African heritage, and continue to be relegated to the margins, the Garífuna often remain within their own communities or prefer to interact with other Garífuna communities of neighboring towns or countries such as Belize or Honduras. Prevalent in the narratives of my participants as well as the literary review, is a strong indictment of the Guatemalan government for persistent exclusion. Perhaps serendipitously, such isolation has resulted in a remarkable sense of community and cultural pride in the Garífuna people. Their blackness is palatable and their shared history with other Africans and African descendants of the diaspora is central to their identity formation. Unlike the black Guatemalans, but similar to the Dominicans, Afro-Panamanians tend to either identify with their West Indian homeland or they have a strong Panamanian national identity.

Following the U.S. intervention to complete the Canal after the French’s failed attempt and also resulting from the United States’ assistance with Panama’s independence from Colombia, U.S. occupation and influence quickly became an unwelcomed way of life for most

Panamanians. Panamanian scholar, Dr. Juan A. Rios Vega, who is mestizo, affirmed that Panamanian racism first came “from la conquista (the conquest) and then was perpetuated by American imperialism/colonialism” (personal communication, September 30, 2014). Amongst black Panamanians, there came to be a divide between those who were descendants of slaves (coloniales) and had a longer history in the Isthmus (dating back to the 16th century) versus those who came in the mid-19th century as migrants to construct the Canal and railroad (Afro-Antillanos). Given the United States’ interventions, throughout Latin America Panama was seen as a pawn of the United States and was identified as a U.S. territory; officially Panama had become a protectorate of the U.S. in 1903 following its independence. To distinguish themselves from the United States, at the national level there was a strong push to blanquear (whiten) through unions of mestizaje (race mixing), to reject all things U.S. American, and to wholeheartedly identify with Latin-American customs. Similar to the history of the Dominican Republic where Dominicans rejected Haitian religion, language, culture, and race, Panamanians rejected the English language, U.S. customs, Protestantism, and the black *negros antillanos* who had come to work in Panama as a result of U.S. occupation. The Dominican Republic and Panama’s denunciation of foreign influence is reminiscent of a prominent tenet of BTF in which they reject foreign domination and imperialism. Dr. Rios Vega noted,

Through history *los negros coloniales* did not welcome West Indians. Even though both groups shared the same skin color, culturally speaking they differed from each other. *Los coloniales* spoke Spanish and adopted the Panamanian culture (Catholicism), but the West Indians spoke English and French and behaved more European (Anglican, Baptist, Methodist religions) and could communicate with the colonizers ([U.S.] Americans). It was a very interesting relationship. [U.S.] Americans segregated West Indians within the Canal Zone and seedy areas in Panama City, but at the same time West Indians were their allies, especially when it was to treat Panamanians as lower class citizens. (personal communication, September 30, 2014)

Exhibiting the correlation between race and class, Dr. Rios Vega added,

These issues brought resentment from both groups in terms of socioeconomic status. Los *negros coloniales* used to emulate Panamanians calling West Indians "*chombos*" because they spoke English and the West Indians looked at *los negros coloniales* as inferior since they did not speak English and had lower salaries than they did. Most West Indians, even though they were victims of a racial system (gold and silver rolls), still had better salaries than the rest of the population. (personal communication, September 30, 2014).

In agreement with Dr. Rios Vega's findings, scholar Sonja Watson (2014) concurred.

As Spanish speakers, Afro-Hispanics (*coloniales*) expressed national solidarity through shared traditions, customs, and rituals associated with the interior provinces of the nation. By contrast, West Indians were immigrants who resided in the peripheral Canal Zone, which became synonymous with "foreigner," the United States, and "outsider...In Panama, the term *negro* continues to generate negative connotations that are associated with slavery, Africa, and the West Indian population. (p. 12)

As cited above, there exist in Panama many terms that depict ranges of African descent "from *mulato* to *mestizo*, *moreno*, and *negro*, depending on their complexion and presence or absence of African features" (Watson, 2014, p. 12). In Panama, where *mulato* is often used to refer to a light skinned black or perhaps a combination of black and white, *mestizo* is not necessarily indicative of distinct racial features, but rather encompasses any mixture of white, indigenous or African descent. Depending upon the overriding features commonly associated with whiteness or blackness, a person of African ancestry could be classified as *moreno* or *negro*. Reminiscent of Latin America, African descendants of the United States continue to use a range of racial terms to demonstrate variances of complexion. Some terms depicting skin tones include *black*, *brown-skinned*, *dark-skinned*, *light-skinned*, *high yellow*, *yellow*, and *mixed*. All of these terms can be used innocuously as color descriptors or as pejoratives depending upon context. Former Black Panther Assata Shakur observed the following in her youth, and it continues to hold true today.

Black made any insult worse. When you called somebody a “bastard,” that was bad. But when you called somebody a “black bastard,” now that was terrible. In fact, when I was growing up, being called “black,” period, was grounds for fighting. “Who you callin’ black?” we would say. We had never heard the words “black is beautiful” and the idea had never occurred to most of us. (Shakur, 1987, p. 30)

Merging the racial politics of both the U.S. American and Latino communities, Afro-Puerto Rican Cruz-Janzen (2001) wrestled with her identity regarding race. Due to their rejection of her, Cruz-Janzen (2001) felt white Latin@s pushed her into the embrace of the African-American communities of New York. In the 1960s she aligned herself with African-Americans during her college years at Cornell University, and she later married an African-American man. Cruz-Janzen’s account below reveals the internal and external conflicts indicative of living on the hyphen. As a result Cruz-Janzen (2001) made the following negotiations,

I severed ties with most Latinos from Latin America, including Puerto Rico, and sought out the African and African American communities. I styled my hair in an Afro and began wearing African clothes. I found myself in a constant struggle to find my identity. I felt obliged to prove my blackness to other African-Americans, even when they looked just like me. I was the victim of jokes because my hair would not stay up, and, called “flat-top” and “lame-fro.” Repeatedly, African Americans told me that I must be ashamed of my African heritage because I tried to conceal it by claiming to be Latina and speaking Spanish. They insisted that blacks were foremost a single people, regardless of where they found themselves or what languages they spoke. (Cruz-Janzen, 2001, p. 173)

Cruz-Janzen’s (2001) painful recollections revealed the multiple negotiations that mixed raced and multiethnic people must confront. There are historical reasons why the African-Americans she encountered wished to identify themselves and Cruz-Janzen as black only. Likewise there are firm foundations for why the Afro-centric Cruz-Janzen was rejected by her fellow Latin@s.

U.S. blacks are often viewed as *Black and Proud* because they overtly name and claim their blackness. Reporting that Dominicans have much to learn from African-Americans, Dominican journalist Aristófanés Urbáez (1995) concluded, “Dominicans *soon understand* that

black Americans are proud to be black, “unlike them” (as paraphrased by Simmons, 2009, p. 72-73). As a result of their racial pride, African-Americans may be skeptical of blacks of the diaspora who do not exhibit such pride in the same manner. One rationale for heightened African-American racial awareness and consciousness is that blacks were “reminded of their blackness and racial place in society because of Jim Crow laws and other structures that reinforced ideas of black and white despite skin color variation in the black community” (Simmons, 2009, p. 70). In other words, since African-Americans were excluded from most institutions and segregated from whites under Jim Crow, they were forced to see, live, and breathe their blackness. There was no escaping it.

Later, given the struggle for civil rights that blacks embarked upon as well as numerous black consciousness movements such as black nationalism, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Black Panther Party to name a few, an attitude of racial pride is well founded. However, we must also acknowledge that we had few options afforded us to identify as anything other than *black*. Other than those who could comfortably *pass*, the hypodescent rule or the one-drop rule boxed black people in, including those who were mixed race, into one homogenous racial category. Even today, we tend to only “allow” those whose *parents* are of different races to claim a mixed or biracial identity (Simmons, 2009). If the mixture extends beyond the parents, say to the grandparents or great grandparents, the person of color is expected to identify their race based on their most oppressed racial identity (Johnson, 2006; Kivel, 1996). In essence, blacks have not been given the historical right to self-select their identity/identities. Currently we are seeing more fluidity as blacks continue to take ownership and agency of their racial assignments.

Contrary to the perception of U.S. black pride, Afro-Latin@s are often denounced as living in denial, being ashamed, or hiding their racial past. To better contextualize Latin@ identity politics, we must recall that in many Latino nations their racial and ethnic identities were

fashioned under a completely different set of social codes. While strict racial segregation was the rule in the United States, miscegenation was not only prominent but also encouraged in much of Latin America. Miscegenation was often presented as normal “in order to foster notions of national unity in the face of the empirically observable ethnic heterogeneity” (Torres-Saillant, 2005, p. 293). Throughout Central and South America and the Caribbean there was a strong push to whiten (blanquear) or to better the race (mejorar la raza). This was done by selecting white or lighter skinned partners. Whether racial mixing was encouraged or discouraged rarely was there public discourse surrounding race relations in Spanish-speaking countries. This silence left few opportunities for Afro-Latin@s to form a black collective consciousness. In so doing, many Latin@s were robbed of the right to self-identify with blackness. According to Simmons (2006), “Racialization is a process by which we continue to understand and internalize racial definitions and concepts developed through particular historical and cultural processes” (as cited in Simmons, 2009, p. 69). In sum, it is incomplete to accept either Afro-American pride or conversely Afro-Latino racial denial without a thorough understanding of the historical context that grounds each. As people continue to cross borders, they will be influenced by new definitions of race. This fluidity may cause them to modify and renegotiate commonly held racial distinctions. One such renegotiation is that Afro-Latina women of all races simultaneously fight for greater visibility within feminist movements throughout the diaspora.

Negotiating Feminism: A Feminist Movement Inclusive of Black Women

Acknowledging the need for an inclusive feminist agenda, Lorde (1995) concluded,

Some problems we [black and white women] share, some we do not. You fear your children will grow up to join the patriarchy and testify against you; we fear our children will be dragged from a car and shot down in the street, and you will turn your backs upon the reasons they are dying. (p. 288)

Afro-Latinas seek to rupture the silence and misrepresentation that surrounds them in both dominant culture and within Latina feminist spaces. As many African-American women (hooks, Hill Collins, Hudson-Weems, Lorde, Wallace) reported experiencing invisibility within the women's movement in the mainland USA, a similar occurrence was evident in Latin America. Lorde (1995) admonished dominant groups (whites, heterosexuals, middle class, men etc.) not to place the burden of their enlightenment on the shoulders of the oppressed, but rather to sift out their own prejudices and begin the difficult journey of dismantling them. Similarly, the black feminist Combahee River Collective cautioned, "Eliminating racism in the white women's movement is by definition work for white women to do, but we [feminists of color] will continue to speak to and demand accountability on this issue." To this end, Wallace (1995) acknowledged the isolation she felt in mainstream feminist movements where race went largely ignored; however, Wallace (1995) questioned who benefited from the disunity between women of color and white women. "The most popular justification black women had for not becoming feminists was their hatred of white women. Obviously, [men] had an interest in keeping black and white women apart—'Women will chatter' (p. 224).

Seeking to problematize and expel hegemonic beauty norms and other oppressions that targeted Latinegras, at the young age of 16 Afro-Puerto Rican Rivera Lassén joined the Puerto Rican feminist group *Mujeres Intégrete Ahora*, MIA (Women Integrate Now). Demonstrating the discomfort of Latina feminists to incorporate race into their discourse, Rivera Lassén (2012) reported,

The gender discourse in Puerto Rico has included reproductive rights, domestic violence, AIDS, sexual harassment, bisexuality, lesbianism, lesbophobia and women's health among others; however, the relationship between race and gender, and the specificity of the related prejudice, has not been as large a part of our agendas as it should have throughout the years. (p. 69)

Rivera Lassén (2012) revealed that she questioned “the invisibility of the theme of race in feminist organizations” (p. 68). She (2012) reported that although she was active in Latina women’s advocacy groups since the 70s, it was not until the early 90s that the first black feminist groups emerged in Puerto Rico. She contends that even before the formation of groups that centered on black experiences, *there was always tension between race and feminism*, a critique reminiscent of African and African-American women’s relationships with feminism. Rivera Lassén (2012) affirmed that the face of MIA was often diverse (including women who were black, white, and mulato); however, “*it is not enough, since it does not link the specific experience of black women to the general discourse*” (p. 69).

As many associate lesbians and gays with living in *el closet*, Rivera Lassén (2012) contended that Afro-descendants inhabit “*el otro closet*” (the other closet). To come out of *el otro closet*, Afro-descendant women “must gather, discuss and organize [themselves]” (p. 70). In the 80s Latinegras in Puerto Rico began to come out of *el otro closet*. This was a time when the feminist movement was slowly becoming multivocal. An often cited feminist powerhouse is Marie Ramos Rosado who dynamically articulated an agenda against racial prejudice that centered the plight of black/Afro-descendant women (Rivera Lassén, 2012). Puerto Rican organizations that emerged in the 1990s as a result of black women’s discourses included Unión de Mujeres Puertorriqueñas Negras (UMUPUEN, Union of Black Puerto Rican Women), Grupo Identidad de la Mujer (Group of Black Women’s Identity) and Red de Mujeres Afrocaribeñas y Afrolatinoamericanas (Network of Afro-Caribbean and Afro-Latin American Women). As one of the founding members of the aforementioned groups, Rivera Lassén (2012) explained that although these networks have been powerful in their purpose and formation, she criticized that they “remain at the periphery of the activities of feminist organizations” (p. 72). Rivera Lassén (2012) offered a possible solution to the invisibility of Afro-descendants, which is transversality

or intersectionality. She critiqued that because many feminist organizations “do not recognize the transversality of identities: they emphasize some identities at the expense of others; consequently, some of them will live in the closet” (p. 73). According to CRT, one factor that contributes to minority invisibility is the *ordinariness of whiteness*. If whiteness is seen and accepted as normal, standard, mainstream, default, dominant, majority, central, centered etc., it stands to reason that, like footnotes on a page, all other identities that are in opposition to whiteness will be forced to the margins. Audre Lorde (1995) concluded, “Ignoring the differences of race between women and the implications of those differences presents the most serious threat to the mobilization of women’s joint power” (p. 286).

Renegotiating Feminism: It Takes a Village

I extend CRT’s premise of the permanence of racism to both the United States and to Latin America. I acknowledge that the permanence of racism will undoubtedly take shape in different manifestations given the distinct historical and social realities of the respective nations; however, the ordinariness of whiteness, colorism and racism might explain in whole or in part the invisibility bestowed upon all who cannot claim white property rights. While society often rejects blackness, the black family structure can serve as a place of both support and acceptance while unfortunately, at times, also reinforcing dominant hegemony. White (1995) surmised,

Moreover, black family life has consistently served as a model of abnormality for the construction of the ideal family life. Black families were matriarchal when white families should have been male-dominated. Now they are said to be female-headed when the ideal has become an equal heterosexual pair. (p. 507)

While dominant culture often condemns the disintegration of the black family and measures its progress against a white backdrop, the black family continues to shield and buffer black offspring against an alien and oppositional social order. Understanding the power inherent in black home

communities, Black Transnational Feminists view the mobility of the black family as central to progress.

The centrality of the family is vividly displayed in the feminist praxis of most Black Transnational Feminists. According to Patricia Hill Collins (2000), “Black women’s centrality in families, churches, and other community organizations allows us to share our concrete knowledge of what it takes to be self-defined” (p. 260). For example, Afro-Venezuelan women formed Coordinadora de Organizaciones no Gubernamentales de Mujeres (CONGM) (Network of Non-Governmental Organizations for Women). Formed in the 90s, CONGM became an umbrella for women to work together from a variety of interests and backgrounds including “feminists, indigenous, black, environmentalists, black and so forth” (Camacho Parra, p. 4). CONGM provided capacity building to women in an Afro-Venezuelan community regarding women’s rights, family violence and racial discrimination” (Camacho Parra, 2012, p. 7).

The founder, Camacho Parra (2012), was adamant that the individual not be forgotten; therefore, in the year 2000 national Venezuelan groups formed a network that would advocate for local and regional movements. “Thus the Red de Organizaciones Afrovenezolanas (ROA, Network of Afro-Venezuelan organizations)” was born (Camacho Parra, 2012, p. 8). ROA believes that achieving the following tenets will uplift the black family, hence uplifting the entire Afro-Venezuelan community. According to Nigerian Kolawole (2002), “Womanism emphasizes ...the centrality of the family and the importance of including men” (p. 96). As a point of clarification, Kolawole’s push to include men is not necessarily related to the family structure. However, she advocates for including men in solidarity with women to end sexist oppression. In concert with Kolawole’s tenets, the main objectives of ROA follow.

- To increase the educational and informational level of women
- To promote the *self-discovery* of African descendants

- To promote education and capacity building to improve the economic standing of Afro-Venezuelans and their *families*.
- To monitor the realities and issues that specifically affect the lives of women such as sexual and reproductive health, discrimination in compensation, *family violence* etc.
- To promote the participation of Afro-Venezuelan women in government and non-governmental leadership.

Akin to the themes of other Black Transnational Feminist Theorists, the core themes of Patricia Hill Collins's Black Feminist Thought follow. You will note the centrality of the family as well as many other canons of Critical Race Theory.

- a. Work
- b. *Family*
- c. Beauty Politics
- d. Sexual/Dating politics
- e. *Motherhood*
- f. Political activism
- g. Outsiders-within

African-American, Clenora Hudson-Weems (1998) defined *Africana Womanism* "as an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture, and therefore, it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of Africana women" (p. 24).

Similar to other Black Transnational Feminist theory in which there is a focus on the family, Clenora Hudson-Weems's *Africana Womanism* includes the following tenets.

- a. Names and defines herself and her movement
- b. *Family-centered*
- c. Welcomes male presence and both challenges and respects her role as homemaker
- d. Sense of spirituality
- e. Committed to mothering and nurturing her own as well as humankind

In BTF the family is broadly defined to include the biological family, solidarity through sisterhood, and solidarity with the larger African diaspora. Black Transnational Feminists

understand that our struggle cannot be won as long as our objectives are individualistic. To the contrary, as we uplift our communities, therein we are synergistically elevating the entire race. As Alice Walker proclaimed: *We are the ones that we have been waiting for.*

The centrality of the family does not equate to euphoria. Previously we saw that the Venezuelan organization ROA did not attempt to present a utopic family structure, but contrariwise, they placed *family violence* high on their list of priorities. In her analysis of the black family, Lorde (1995) revealed, “Exacerbated by racism and the pressures of powerlessness, violence against black women and children often becomes a standard within our communities, one by which manliness can be measured. But these woman-hating acts are rarely discussed as crimes against black women” (p. 288). Unmistakably, from Latin America to the United States, Black Transnational Feminists acknowledge the pitfalls of some black families and communities, nevertheless, if women only strengthen themselves while doing nothing to enlighten their male counterparts, what victory has truly been won? Relatedly, if only feminists (of any race) are enlightened to the exclusion of the patriarchy, how will the revolution to end sexist oppression ever be accomplished? To the contrary, I recommend building networks of solidarity amongst members of black communities as well as with other women.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

My Epistemological Lens

My epistemological lens is influenced by both my vocation and the intersections of multiple identities. As a woman of African descent who teaches Spanish, I view the world from a global perspective and I conduct research through a transnational lens. Specifically, I am drawn to Black Transnational Feminist epistemology as a medium to highlight the social realities of women of African descent. Sharlene Hesse-Biber (2007) observed, “There is also a growing awareness among feminist researchers of the importance of women’s experiences in a global context with respect to issues of imperialism, colonialism, and national identity” (p. 13). Given that feminist research seeks a multiplicity of women’s voices (Anderson, 1995), this study integrates narrative inquiry to focus on the lived experiences of Afro-Latina women immigrants. Hesse-Biber (2007) affirmed that feminist inquiry must also reclaim subjugated knowledge. Since the doors of the academy have been historically closed to black women’s voices, Black Transnational Feminist epistemology is an ideal platform on which to showcase the stages of my participants’ lived realities.

With a deficit of information recorded on Afro-Latina women, Black Transnational Feminist epistemology seeks to combat historical omissions. In an attempt to lift up Afro-Latina women’s voices, as a researcher I had to be careful not to fetishize my relationship with the participants or overly romanticize my findings. To maintain a balanced research agenda, I consistently checked in with my subjectivity and sought the counsel of my dissertation advisor,

Dr. Leila Villaverde, to address any imbalances. With these checks and measures in place, I am confident that I adhered to trustworthy ethical standards.

Although in feminist inquiry there is no single research method (Hesse-Biber, 2004), according to Villaverde (2008), an epistemology grounds “the way research is designed, implemented, and articulated” (p.107). I aim to expand feminist scholarship by considering transnational contributions. As a Spanish educator, language is the vehicle of my discipline. The participants’ words serve as conductors while my pen charts the pathways to their lived experiences. The inextricable link between speaking and listening informs both my instructional and research practices. I privilege the negotiation of language and the power of voice which is indicative of the spoken word. According to Anderson (1995), “The theories produced by our practices of inquiry may bear the marks of the social relations of the inquirers” (p. 53). That said, it is comprehensible that I should seek an epistemology that is commensurate with my spirit of inquiry and the goals of my research. As described by Denzin (2010) with respect to the bricolage, one must not be afraid to incorporate new voices and new ways of doing. Both bell hooks (1984) and Hill Collins (2000) acknowledged that feminism has often been relegated to those most privileged to reach institutions of higher education. Bell hooks (1984) problematized a feminism that is only theoretical given that it isolates the body of work from the masses who are not college students and who do not have access to women’s studies programs.

While [Women’s Studies] programs are necessary and are an extremely effective way to teach college students about feminism, they have very little impact, if any, on masses of women and men. This kind of information needs to reach more people. (hooks, 1984, p. 111)

For this reason, feminist theorists beseech researchers to look beyond the academy and to search out *ordinary* women’s voices in order to add validity and trustworthiness to our scholarship.

Heeding their call, the study participants reflect multiple levels of diversity: Some come from

middle class families while others described their upbringing as one of dire poverty. Some have college degrees while others barely completed the sixth grade. Some participants could pass for white, while others have dark skin and could easily pass for African-American. The diversity of the participants yields incomparable analytical substance and depth. Following is a profile of each study participant.

Participant Profile

Table 2. Participant Profile

Pseudonym/ Kinship	Country of Origin/ Socioeconomic class in country of origin	Age at time of immigration to United States/ Current age	Self-Identifications (based on participants' self-disclosure)
Blanca (see footnote)	Dominican Republic (Middle class)	35/47	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Nationalism</i>: Primarily identifies as Dominican ▪ <i>Racial classification</i>: Racially identifies as white (blanca*) ▪ <i>Heritage</i>: Of African, Lebanese, Spanish descent
Julia (Julia is Maria's aunt)	Dominican Republic (Very poor)	19/30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Nationalism</i>: Primarily identifies as Dominican ▪ <i>Racial classification</i>: Racially identifies as brown (morena) ▪ <i>Heritage</i>: Of Spanish & African descent
María (see footnote)	Dominican Republic (Very poor)	26/44	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Nationalism</i>: Primarily identifies as Dominican ▪ <i>Racial classification</i>: Racially identifies as white (blanca*) ▪ <i>Heritage</i>: Of Spanish & African descent
Elisa (Elisa is Eufemia's daughter)	Guatemala (Poor)	18/53	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Nationalism</i>: Guatemalan is not a primary identity ▪ <i>Racial classification</i>: Racially identifies as Black (negra) ▪ <i>Heritage</i>: Primarily identifies as Garífuna
Eufemia	Guatemala (Poor)	66/80	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Nationalism</i>: Guatemalan is not a primary identity ▪ <i>Racial classification</i>: Racially identifies as Black (negra) ▪ <i>Heritage</i>: Primarily identifies as Garífuna
Azucena (Azucena is Jelly's mother)	Panama (Middle class)	34/44	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Nationalism</i>: Primarily identifies as Panamanian ▪ <i>Racial classification</i>: Brown (morena); black Panamanian, mulata ▪ <i>Heritage</i>: Afro-Antillean (Afro-Antillana); Hispanic; Of Jamaican descent
Jelly	Panama (Middle class)	13/21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Nationalism</i>: Primarily identifies as Panamanian ▪ <i>Racial classification</i>: black ▪ <i>Heritage</i>: Hispanic; Black Hispanic; Of Jamaican descent
Iris	Panama (Working class)	50/60	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Nationalism</i>: Primarily identifies as Panamanian ▪ <i>Racial classification</i>: Brown (morena) ▪ <i>Heritage</i>: Afro-Hispanic (Afro-Hispana); Cimarron

*Note: To participate in this study, the respondents had to acknowledge that they were of African descent. Most respondents (6/8) actually identified as black or brown; however, based on physical characteristics Blanca and María both identified as white and were outwardly read as white by others. They wished to participate in the study because regardless of phenotype, they recognized their African heritage. I also welcomed their participation to add diversity to the respondent pool and to demonstrate that African heritage and descent goes beyond observable features. Given their particular positionalities, María and Blanca offered unique insights.

According to previously published works (Frank, Akresh, & Lu, 2010; Newby & Dowling, 2008; Saperstein, 2006; Vaquero & Kao, 2006) some participants may identify as Afro-Latina based on a myriad of factors including physical characteristics, ancestry, demographics of residential community, geopolitics and national origin, race of romantic partner, socioeconomic status, and/or perceived privileges or disadvantages associated with certain racial identities. As aforementioned, the research has correlated many elements that may contribute to the ways in which Latin@s identify their race; however, few studies have allowed Latin@s to provide an explanation for their self-identifications. Filling a gap in the literature where Latin@ participants have rarely been given the opportunity to explain their identity selection, I posed a question to my participants that allowed them to describe the factors that influenced their selection.

Next, I sought participants who were born and reared in Latin America. For the participants to be able to convey a traveling narrative that draws comparisons between their native country and the United States, they must have spent time actually living in their home countries. According to Mikkonen (2007),

The question of the relation between travel and narrative is indeed large and complex. A travel story is dependent on the projection and experience of a world from a particular perspective, a person or a group of people moving through space in a given time, enabling thus the treatment of space as a stage for possible narrative action. Narrative progress, therefore, is intimately related to, even if it does not always equal, the representation of the traveler's experience of space and time. (p. 287)

Considering the complexity of travel narratives, I searched for participants who immigrated to the United States during their teenage to young adult years when they were roughly between the ages of 15-25. I pursued this age range so that their experiences in their home countries would be substantial enough to offer a first-hand narrative of comparison.

Participant Selection: Meet the Participants

Through purposeful sampling & snowballing, I solicited friends, colleagues, and strangers to assist me in locating participants who *self-identified* as Afro-Latina. In this regard I did not impose or assume an identity on my participants, but rather I used their self-identification as the foundation of my work. Although *Afro-Latina* is the umbrella term that I have chosen for this study, my participants used other identifiers to describe themselves, many of which have surfaced both in my review of the literature and in my pilot interviews. Some of the preferred terms follow: Afro-Latina, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Hispana, Afro-Antillana, Afro-Colonial, Latinegra, black-Latina, Negra, and identification by country of origin such as Afro-Cubana or simply Cubana. Although I recognize the complexity of labels, for my research purposes I define Afro-Latina as follows: Latinas of African descent who were born in Latin America and later immigrated to the southern United States.

The research participants represent three Latin American countries: Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and Panama and two different regions: the Caribbean and Central America. This standard aligns with the published works of Dr. Henry Louis Gates Jr., *Black in Latin America*, in which he focused on four Spanish speaking countries (Cuba, Dominican Republic, Mexico, & Peru) encompassing the Caribbean and South America with Mexico lying in North America (Gates, 2011). I chose these countries primarily because I was granted welcomed access to members of these communities. During my pilot study I had conducted research on the Dominican Republic and Panama with a different group of participants. My interest was piqued by the initial findings and I wished to delve deeper into the experiences of these Afro-descendants. I had never been acquainted with Guatemalan Afro-descendants; therefore, their stories and histories were unknown to me. However, prior to this study I made the acquaintance of an Afro-Guatemalan family, the women were eager to share their stories. The Dominican

Republic, Guatemala, and Panama also added depth and variety to the pilot research that I had conducted previously on Afro-Cuban and Afro-Mexican descendants.

Dominican Participants

The Dominican Republic has received an abundance of scholarly attention (Bailey, 2001; Candelario, 2000, 2001; Gates, 2011; Itzigsohn, 2004; Martinez, 2003; Simmons, 2009; Torres-Saillant, 1998, 1990, 2000) and was highlighted further when featured in Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s (2011) acclaimed documentary series along with the book of the same title: *Black in Latin America*. Given that I had read extensive research published on the island as well as conducted pilot interviews with Afro-Dominican immigrants, I aspired to delve deeper into the experiences of Afro-Dominicans and to learn how the island's rich history had impacted their lives. I also aimed to conduct further research on what some would call the Dominican *racial identity crisis*. In tandem with other published scholars, I often described the Dominican's racial identity as a nation plagued by silence and denial. Dominican anthropologist, Juan Rodriguez, also noted, "Dominicans are in complete denial about who they are" (Gates, 2011, p. 131). However, Kimberly Simmons (2009) countered,

Recently, there has been much discussion of black denial associated with Dominicans (Candelario, 2007) in terms of how they define themselves without seemingly taking their African ancestry into account. The word "denial" suggests that there is a negative response to a question or idea. In other words, "denial" implies that Dominicans do not believe that they have African ancestry. And this is not the case. To the contrary, African ancestry is often acknowledged, but it is downplayed... (p. 2-3)

Simmons' (2009) book *Reconstructing Racial Identity and the African Past in the Dominican Republic* raised some interesting questions and provided a stunning comparative analysis of the construction of race in the United States and the Dominican Republic. Her findings piqued my desire to take a second look at some of my previous conclusions as well as those presented prominently in the literature. As providence would have it, while my husband and

I were dining at a local restaurant, I noticed a group of Afro-Latin@s seated at the table adjacent to us. They caught my attention because I clearly detected a Spanish Caribbean accent. Additionally, the group of four, whom I later found out was a family, represented Latin America's cultural heritage. As I interrupted what appeared to be a peaceful lunch, full of timidity I reluctantly approached the strangers. With my husband encouraging me to make their acquaintance, I hurriedly explained my research project to them in Spanish. To my relief and dismay, most were more than willing to participate. Two women wished to participate in the project, while one declined, citing that she did not live in the United States and was merely visiting from Santo Domingo. As an added bonus, one of the women, María, offered that she was the owner of a Dominican Hair Salon. She promised to solicit the support of other Dominican stylists who worked at her salon. She also gave me full access to the salon to conduct interviews and observations. In the end, three women from the salon agreed to participate in the study.

Guatemalan Participants

Next, I attend an international church that has a considerable Latin@ population. I am the main interpreter for the Hispanic Ministry, serving in my role for over a decade. With this position, I have the opportunity and the pleasure to meet Latin@s from various parts of Latin America. I collaborated with some of them in the past by inviting them to my Spanish classes to give guest lectures on their cultures and experiences. I also served as an interpreter and/or translator in local business settings for those who lacked English proficiency. One Afro-Latina family enthusiastically agreed to participate in the study. The mother, Eufemia and daughter, Elisa are both from Guatemala. These women have attended my church for about 2-3 years. They are not only black-Latinas, but they are also of the *Garífuna* people group, formally known as black Caribs. The Garífunas are descendants of captured Africans who were trafficked through the Caribbean intended to be enslaved by Europeans. Serendipitously, their ship crashed. As a

result, many of their captors and some fellow Africans died; however, some of the enslaved survived. The survivors mixed with the native indigenous population, but retained a hybrid of their ancestral African language and many African customs. After centuries of land and property wars, the English deported the Garífunas to what is the present-day Belizean and Honduran coast. One of the largest populations of Garífuna descendants currently reside in Livingston, Guatemala. Livingston is the village of my participants. Needless to say, Eufemia and Elisa are rich jewels of information in terms of their lived experiences, cultural heritage, and their immigration narratives.

Panamanian Participants

Finally, I initially planned to interview three Panamanian women who were of the same family. We had collaborated previously on cultural projects and had even published a local article together that highlighted various black women of the African diaspora. When I phoned my Panamanian contact to arrange the interviews for this study, she expressed great distress. She was going through a divorce, her sister was having surgery, and her mother had returned to Panama. Although she was willing to still participate in the study, I felt it would be selfish to demand any of her time given the circumstances. Thankfully, about six months prior I had given a presentation on my research at a state world language conference. Afterward, an Afro-Panamanian woman, *Iris*, approached me and expressed how much she identified with my participants and my findings. She gave me her contact information and I safeguarded it in case I needed it in the future. I did not think that I would need additional Panamanian participants since I had an entire family that had agreed to participate; however, given their adversities I decided to call upon Iris instead. She was more than willing to participate, and through snowballing she was able to connect me with two other Panamanian women, *Azucena and Jelly*, who also readily

agreed to join the study. I was appreciative of Iris and very thankful that our chance encounter at the state conference led to an opportune collaboration.

In total my participants numbered eight Afro-Latinas: three Dominican women, three Panamanian women, and two Guatemalan women. I also incorporated data collected during the pilot stage of my dissertation from two additional Dominican participants and one Panamanian, all of whom formally consented to participate in the study. Although my participant pool was not numerically vast, each respondent provided in depth storytelling that yielded rich interpretive data. The number of participants in my study is supported by contemporary publications. For example, notwithstanding the contributions of the editors, the number of contributors to one of the most recently published narrative texts on Afro-Latina women titled: *Women Warriors of the Afro-Latina Diaspora* compiles the stories of 10 Afro-Latina women. Like my study participants' narratives, the *Women Warrior's* stories offer intense diversity of thought and lived experiences.

My participants make up a complex marginality in terms of their race, ethnicity, gender and national origin. Given that they have been historically silenced, they longed to tell their stories. For this reason, the participants responded to the interview questions with profundity and the questions often evoked emotion. Given the perspicacity with which they responded, in most instances I needed to speak with the respondents at least twice to conduct the interviews, and once virtually for member checking of transcripts. I conducted one or two additional observations in a social setting of their choosing.

I conducted individual interviews twice with the Panamanians and with one Dominican participant. Each individual interview lasted between 40 minutes and 2.5 hours. I conducted group interviews twice with the Guatemalan and remaining Dominican participants which lasted between one hour and two hours. I observed each group of participants in different social settings. I accompanied the Guatemalans to an international resource center, Industries for the Blind, and

to a church service (about 1 hour in each locale). I accompanied one Panamanian participant to a church concert (about 2 hours) and another Panamanian participant to a hair salon appointment (about 1.5 hours). Finally, I conducted all Dominican observations in their hair salon (about 5-6 hours).

Glesne (2011) admonished the researcher to always keep the door propped open with participants as opposed to making finite goodbyes or prematurely concluding the research. Glesne advised that you never know when you may need to return. Yielding her advice, I established good working relationships with my participants by sharing the research process with them and by incorporating strategies of trustworthiness.

Data Collection: In-Depth Interviews

Narrative research takes shape in many forms. While “first-person accounts of experience constitute the narrative text,” there is a litany of possibilities for the form by which the narrative is constructed. Some possibilities include, although not limited to, “autobiography, life history, *interview*, journal, letters, or other materials that we collect”...Additionally, “narrative analysis extends the idea of text to include *in-depth interview* transcripts...” (Merriam, 2009). My primary form of data collection is an in-depth interview with pre-determined questions (see attached). When working with Philippine participants in Canada, researcher Pratt conducted individual interviews because they “allowed a more thorough examination of the particularities of individual lives” (Pratt, 2010, p. 69). Lichtman (2013) recommended beginning the interview with a grand tour question or a specific story question in order to build a rapport with the participant (p. 143). I asked the grand tour question, “I am researching the impact that race has had on the experiences of Afro-Latina immigrants; tell me about your background.” I had specific interview questions that I posed directly after my participants gave their initial statements. Most of my participants began their narratives with biographical information and also explained their cultural heritage and

ancestry. The combining of the grand tour question as well as the pre-determined questions resulted in a *semi-structured interview*. Although my questions provided structure and guidance to the process, I remained flexible throughout the interview so that “questions emerged in the course of interviewing and added to or replaced pre-established ones” (Glesne, 2011, p. 102).

Data Collection: Group Interviews

A group interview is defined as “a unique kind of interview, in that it collects data from a number of people in a manner that is non-quantitative. The aim of a [group interview] is to gain greater understanding on a topic, not to determine where there is agreement between and among participants” (Kanuka, 2010, p. 101). There can be some overlap in the structure of the one-on-one interview as well as the group interview. “As in one-on-one interviews, the researcher designs questions aimed at getting words to fly;” to continue the thread of conversation during the group interview, I was comfortable using the same research questions as used in the one-on-one setting. I made some modifications when needed (Glesne, 2011, p. 131).

“[G]roup interviewing can be an efficient use of time in that it allows access to the perspectives of a number of people during the same period” (Glesne, 2011, p. 133). According to Morgan (1997), “The simplest test of whether [group interviews] are appropriate for a research project is to ask how actively and easily the participants would discuss the topic of interest” (as quoted by Glesne, 2011, p. 131). Although the Panamanian participants wished to interview individually, the Dominican and Guatemalan participants were set more at ease when accompanied by their relatives: thus the group interview structure was ideal in the case of the latter.

Drawbacks to Group Interviews

As with any form of data collection, group interviews are not without limitations. Participants may be greatly influenced by the comments or personalities of their co-participants.

Their answers may be swayed by the other voices with which they share a space. “Although the discussion may generate new ideas as people explore their experiences and perspectives, it may also silence some people whose ideas are quite different from the majority of those speaking” (Glesne, 2011, p. 134). I understand that “group interviewing relies heavily on facilitation and moderator skills” (Glesne, 2011, p. 131). Since most of my participants were not academicians, I incorporated strategies to support a more inclusive research environment. I sent the pre-approved documents (research summary and informed consent) from the Institutional Review Board (see Appendix B) to the participants in advance in order for them to read them closely in their leisure. All documents throughout the study were bilingual in both English and Spanish. I then went over the key components of the 6-page research summary and informed consent in a face-to-face setting. Next, I emphasized the need for confidentiality and explained that I too was accountable to the participants as a confidential researcher. Finally, I answered any questions that they had regarding the research process.

Next, during the interviews I allowed conversation to flow freely as opposed to enumerating my list of questions in any particular order. As a result, many of my questions were answered as the participants were given the freedom to liberally tell their stories. When their narratives did not adequately respond to my predetermined questions I would directly pose the questions to each participant. To create an atmosphere of dialogue, I tried to present my questions thematically; meaning that when a participant’s response aligned well with one of my predetermined questions I would take that opportunity to insert the question into the dialogue. In this regard, the rhythm of the conversation went uninterrupted. Finally, I expressed my desire to sincerely offer a multivocal space where all voices and experiences are valued and heard, even if they diverged from the rest. By acknowledging beforehand both the advantages and limitations of group interviews, I was able to serve as a more effective facilitator.

Flexibility in Qualitative Research: Renegotiating the Research Process

After confronting the unexpected life developments of my initial Panamanian participants I understood the vital importance of flexibility in qualitative research. My participants are co-researchers and their schedules, availability, and life circumstances must be of paramount importance if the collaboration is to be successful. Following are some of the modifications that had to be made throughout the data collection process.

I began collecting data during the summer months; therefore, several participants had travel plans, family visits, or medical procedures that required scheduling adjustments. Since two of my participants were teachers, once school resumed in August they were not as available to me as they had been during the summer break and hence I had to adjust accordingly.

Initially, I had planned to conduct both individual interviews and group interviews with each set of participants; however, this proved to be more challenging in practice. It resulted that the data collection became more of a conflation of the initial plan. In the case of the Dominicans, I was able to conduct two group interviews with María and Julia and an individual interview with Blanca. This shift was due to the fact that Julia has only been in the United States for about one year and she does not drive. For this reason, she preferred to be interviewed only when María was also being interviewed for ease of transportation. By necessity, María and Julia had to work the same schedules in order to facilitate carpooling. Given their transportation constraints and synchronized work schedules, it proved more advantageous to interview the women together. Interviewing them together worked well because they shared a great sense of humor and the one energized the other. Their interviews were my most lively.

In terms of personality, stylist Blanca was more reserved and she kindly worked me into her schedule in between hair appointments. Instead of having an hour or two to speak freely, we would speak for 20 minutes, she would go and finish her client and then she would come back for

another 20-minute interview session until the next client needed her attention. Given this arrangement, Blanca's interview did not flow as smoothly, although she did provide insightful data.

Blanca had a different set of circumstances that required her to interview alone. Blanca lived in a different city than the other two stylists. Furthermore, the salon and Blanca's residence were in two different cities. Since Mondays are her slow days at the salon, she preferred to meet on Mondays only. Mondays posed a problem for arranging the group interviews because neither María nor Julia worked on Mondays and they preferred not to be at the salon during operational hours given that it was their day off. For these reasons, it was easier to interview María and Julia together while interviewing Blanca separately. In retrospect, I believe this arrangement was beneficial. Blanca's responses greatly differed from María and Julia's. Her perspectives were consistent outliers. Blanca was further distinguished from the other Dominican participants given that she is not a relative. There is also a hierarchical paradigm since Blanca is María's employee. For the reasons aforementioned, I believe that Blanca fared better interviewing alone. She was able to give open, yet divergent responses without the influence of her peers and supervisor.

I had to make further modifications for the Panamanian participants. Since they resided over two hours apart from each other, it proved to be a hardship for them to travel to meet together; therefore, I interviewed each Panamanian participant twice, but individually. In addition, the day following my initial interview with Azucena, she had leg surgery, causing her to be immobile for about one month while convalescing. Interviewing the Panamanian women individually did not pose a problem in that I was able to go much deeper with the participants than if I had done the group setting.

In the case of the Guatemalans, they too had health concerns. One of my Guatemalan participants, Eufemia, is completely blind and therefore needed to be in the care of her daughter

most of the time. Given the mother's disability, neither woman felt comfortable without the other. For this reason, I was unable to conduct individual interviews with the Guatemalans; however, I interviewed them on two separate occasions, resulting in rich analytical data. I did not find this arrangement to be problematic because both women had distinctly separate voices and were not afraid to diverge and share diverse opinions. As you will note throughout the dissertation, one participant's responses were not dependent upon, nor instigated by, the other. Given the depths of their interviews, the Guatemalan respondents proved to be one of my richest and most invaluable data sources for this project.

Nuances of Bilingual Research: From Transcriber to Translator

Of my eight participants, six opted to interview completely in Spanish: three participants did not speak English (Eufemia, Julia, and María). Three participants, Blanca, Elisa, and Iris, although conversant in English, felt more comfortable in their native Spanish tongues and hence opted to interview in Spanish. Finally, since Azucena and Jelly were Afro-Antillanas, meaning Panamanians of Jamaican or West Indian origin, they had grown up in bilingual settings in which English was as prominent as Spanish. For this reason they were quite comfortable in either language. They asked me which language I would prefer, and I graciously requested that they interview in English since it would save me several hours of having to first transcribe from Spanish to Spanish and then to translate from Spanish to English.

I spent months working on the data transcripts. Since I am fluent in Spanish and had the summer term off, I was able to comfortably complete the transcriptions myself; however, having to both transcribe and then translate into English proved to be a momentous task. One of the strategies that I used to lighten my load was to transcribe every word spoken from the interview recordings into the original language; however, the plan was to only translate the quotes into English that would actually be used in the writing of the dissertation. This strategy assisted

somewhat, however, since I ended up using so many of their rich quotes for the dissertation, the amount of translations proved copious.

Not only was it time consuming to do both operations, an added challenge was that my participants were from three different Spanish-speaking countries with very distinct accents, verbiage, syllabic influxes, linguistic registers, enunciations, lexicons, semantics, and word choices. For example, each participant used the word *mulat@*; yet, the word signified something completely different depending upon their country of origin. Amongst the Garífunas of Guatemala *mulat@* meant mixed with black and white whereas in Panama it simply referred to a light brown or light skinned black person. *Morena* was another such term. In the Dominican Republic it signified some sort of an intercultural mixture, whereas in Panama it was synonymous with black or African descent. Finally, both my Guatemalan and Panamanian participants used the term *native* to describe certain phenotypes. Initially I thought the term referred to Latinos who were of Indian or indigenous heritage. However, in both instances the term actually meant lighter skinned Latinos or those who Candelario (2000) called the “standard-looking Hispanic” such as Jennifer Lopez or América Ferrera. “In cultural interviewing, researchers learn the rules, norms, values, and understanding” of the culture their participants represent (Glesne, 2011, p. 103).

In order to convey my participants’ words with the highest degree of accuracy, I resisted occupying the ambivalent position of La Malinche. La Malinche was a 16th century Aztec princess in Mexico who served the Spanish conquistador, Hernan Cortes, as “interpreter, negotiator, slave, and mistress” (Villaverde, 2008, p. 19). In doing so she became a central tool in Cortes’ conquering of the Aztec people. “Some regard her as a traitor, others as a negotiator” (Villaverde, 2008, p.19). As an interlocutor, the researcher must be careful not to betray “the most remarkable parts of their narratives, the pattern of their own priorities” (Casey, 1993, p. 19). A

tool that I used to limit the betrayal or misinterpretation of any portion of my participants' narratives was member checking.

Member checking became more necessary in this study than in prior English language studies that I had conducted because I had to be very careful not to assume certain words held the same meaning in the respective countries. When in doubt, I asked, and the participants were very gracious to clarify. On the other hand, a monumental advantage to having completed the transcriptions and translations myself is the intimacy with which I came to know the voices of my respondents. While first language transcribing calls for a great deal of listening and re-listening, second language transcribing calls for even more attentiveness to details. Translation requires analytical reasoning, linguistic precision, and trustworthiness so that the original meaning is not unduly altered or lost in the translation. While allowing for some flexibility and even creativity, the golden rule of translation is to remain true to the intended meaning of the original source. Member checking proved to be an invaluable resource in accomplishing these aims of trustworthiness.

Trustworthiness

To demonstrate that our research findings are “plausible or credible” researchers create standards of trustworthiness (Glesne, 2011, p. 49). Crewell (2007) describes eight common procedures that contribute to the support of qualitative research. A summary follows.

1. Prolonged engagement and persistent observation
2. Triangulation or crystallization
3. Peer review and debriefing by external party
4. Negative case analysis
5. Clarification of research bias and monitoring of subjectivity
6. Member checking
7. Rich, thick descriptions
8. External audit

According to Glesne (2011), “Attending to all of these means of increasing trustworthiness is not necessary in any one study, but validity issues are often aspects to consider...in your research proposal” (p. 49). For my research study, I used three procedures to ensure trustworthiness: Incorporation of rich, thick descriptions, member checking and clarification of researcher bias (including her limitations, positionality, and subjectivity). Incorporating the following strategies will contribute to the trustworthiness of my analysis within an interpretive context.

Rich, Thick, Descriptions

After coding and analyzing the data, I used rich, thick descriptions when writing up the findings. According to Savin-Baden & Major (2010), a thick description involves “an explanation of the context as well as the importance of the interpretation” (p. 178). Offering thick descriptions goes beyond reciting details to offering a significant interpretation that is more profound than mere “meaning & motivations” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2010, p. 178). Interpretivists such as Gertz (1973) rely on thick descriptions to make meaning out of social interactions (as cited in Glesne, 2011). Denzin (1989) defines a thick description as a “description that goes beyond the mere or bare reporting of an act (thin description), but describes and probes the intentions, motives, meanings, contexts, situations and circumstances of action” (as quoted by Glesne, 2011, p. 35). Interpretivists seek to provide a direct interpretation of lived experiences as opposed to “abstract generalizations” (Glesne, 2011, p. 35). Interpretivists consider all human experiences to be composed of complex stories that are “filled with multiple, often conflicting, meanings and interpretations” (Glesne, 2011, p. 35). In drafting my findings I looked beyond the surface in order to capture the profundity of my participants’ stories.

Member Checking

Member checking is a process of ensuring plausibility in which participants are contacted to ask whether data interpretations or findings are accurate (Savin-Baden & Major, 2010, p. 176). After conducting two to three in-person interviews with participants, I met all participants either virtually or face-to-face for a third time to perform member checks. I either emailed participants the interview transcripts or met with them to present transcripts and some findings so that they might offer feedback on the accuracy of the transcribed data and subsequent analysis. I also used the member checking session if I had any loose ends to tie up such as additional questions or clarifications. Likewise, the participants had the opportunity to do the same.

Researcher Subjectivity

Peshkin (1988) acknowledged, “one’s subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed. It is insistently present in both the research and nonresearch aspects of our life” (p. 17). As a black woman of the African diaspora, I too am a co-conspirator with my participants for change. As I aim to record the experiences of the respondents, likewise I must be conscious of my unspoken story that is constantly at play.

Bruce (2008) explained, “The narrative inquirer challenges researchers to name their subjectivity...rather than hide behind the guise of neutrality” (p. 328-329). In an attempt to search and seize the subjectivities that I possessed, using Peshkin’s work as a model, I have outlined my subjectivities that surfaced during the research process. According to Bruce (2008), “Human subjectivity is complex” (p. 329). In this regard, I acknowledge that although I have deliberately sought transparency and thoughtfulness in my reflective process, admittedly there are many other subjectivities that I have yet to unveil.

Naming my Subjectivity: “We are One”

Drawing from my own experiences and from noted scholars, I seek to build solidarity amongst women, and particularly amongst women of the African diaspora. As quoted by Patricia Hill Collins (2000), "Sisterhood is not new to black women," asserts Bonnie Thornton Dill, but "while black women have fostered and encouraged sisterhood, we have not used it as the anvil to forge our political identities" (p.260). Given my love of black sisterhood, commitment to solidarity amongst *all women*, but in particular my bonds with African descendant women of the diaspora, I automatically embrace Afro-Latina participants as part of my sisterhood attributable to our linked history to the African continent. In my commitment to feminist activism and to a feminist epistemology, I recognize the power of linking arms with women of color for common social justice aims. The Combahee River Collective stated, "There is also undeniably a personal genesis for black feminism, that is, the political realization that comes from the seemingly personal experiences of individual black women's lives" (p. 233). Accepting my responsibility as a black feminist scholar, I was motivated to bring the experiences of Afro descendant women to the forefront after having spent years on the sidelines.

Peshkin (1988) offered strategies to combat subjectivity such as the pursuit of subjectivity, looking for positive and negative feelings, and monitoring one's emotional, physical, and physiological responses in a given context (p. 18). I took Peshkin's advice to heart and elected to name my subjectivities. With many of my participants, although not all, we share similar physical characteristics & relatable cultural and historical experiences. Whenever I meet someone who is of the African diaspora, I am curious to know their stories. A quiet smile often marks my countenance. This reaction may be similar to the way that some people of the same nationality may view each other when they learn that they are from the same country, or the way that some mixed raced people may feel upon meeting another mixed raced individual or the way

that an athlete may feel upon meeting another athlete. Commonalities often unify groups; these commonalities are what sociologists constitute as *culture*.

While attending the 2013 conference of the American Educational Studies Association, I heard the words of scholar Dr. Denise Baszile. She contended that “all research is autobiographical.” No doubt, my personal autobiography impacts my research agenda. As a researcher I must be aware of my enthusiasm and use it, as Dr. Denise Baszile supports, as a hook that may act as a catalyst for my research interests. On the other hand, I must be careful not to impose a U.S. construct of cultural heritage & racial identities & experiences on a people who may have lived and thrived under a different standard. I must be mindful not to overly engage Afro-Latinas who share my vision of the African diaspora as one family at the expense of disengaging Afro-Latinas who acknowledge no such linked fate, shared history, or shared origins. Although not exempt from analysis, their stories must be birthed from their own experiences, and not dependent upon my own experiences or overromanticized as other.

Subjectivity: From Theory to Practice

During this research study, I recorded narratives that triggered an array of emotions. Some of the participants’ stories made me smile with pride, others brought sadness given their adversities, and some stories even brought uneasiness and discomfort due to their incongruence with my own personal life experiences and beliefs. For example, there were many racial and gender based experiences narrated by participants with which I naturally identified given my positionality as an African-American woman. Simmons (2009) affirmed that within black transnational collaborations, what often emerges is “a community of consciousness, a mutual recognition of similarity, and a strategic alliance based on shared history and lived experience” (p. 71). However, there were many points of divergence between the participants and me. For example, as a naturalized citizen I had not experienced the plight of migration; therefore, some of

the immigration narratives were distant, distressing, and even agonizing to hear. Though few, there were moments when participants were quite reproachful of groups that I hold dear such as Mexicans (I worked in Mexico every summer for five years) and African-Americans. At times it was unsettling to me to hear such denigration of ethnicities that I considered to be family or to hear stereotypes of those who I felt had been equally oppressed by the same hegemonic system as my participants. I learned to set my emotions aside long enough to return to my primary research questions. *Although it would be impossible to divorce who I am from this project, the purpose of this study is to record the lived experiences of my participants and not my own.* According to Hill Collins, “The narrative method requires that the story be told, not torn apart in analysis, and trusted as core belief, not admired as science” (p. 258).

Since Bruce (2008) cautioned against the guise of neutrality, I owned my emotions and worked through them. One way that I worked through them was to re-read the transcripts and to member check. In this process, I would often find that I had been overly sensitive and needed to place distance between my emotions and the participants’ stories. Upon re-listening or having the participants to clarify, I would discover that their initial statements did not always convey the totality of their sentiments. Other times, when their words cut or diverged from my own beliefs about certain concepts or communities, I would talk to other researchers about my struggles, positionality, and subjectivity. Together we created a *critical community* in which we helped one another to navigate this journey of inquiry, a journey that can often be isolating, personal, and sentimental.

In the cases where I strongly identified with my participants’ reflections, as a researcher, I learned to be cautious of not holding them sacred. Conversely, when certain statements troubled me, I learned to analyze them based on the research and not based on any personal agenda. Either extreme can be discordant: overly connecting with participants can lead to an analysis that is

biasedly sacrosanct, while overly disconnecting from participants can lead to an exaggerated critique. A balance was obtained by consulting with colleagues, remaining true to my primary research agenda, working within a theoretical frame, employing trustworthy research strategies, being aware of my own partialities, and conducting member checks. With these strategies I was able to remain open and malleable while simultaneously upholding the integrity of the research process.

Narrative Research Methods

Why Narrative Inquiry?

In order to gain insight into the lived experiences of Afro-Latina women, I concluded that narrative analysis was the most advantageous research method. “Narrative analysis incorporates first person accounts in story form. As a method it uses the told and lived stories people tell” (Lichtman, 2013, p. 95). Be it conscious or unconsciously done, all Afro-Latin@ research that I have read to date acknowledges in some way a silencing of the voices and experiences of Afro-Latin@s, occurring both in their home countries and also in the United States. Related to the underrepresentation of Afro-Latin@s in literature, Reyes & Criado (2005) affirmed,

Las escritoras Afro-Hispanas se esfuerzan en reivindicar su dignidad y valor como individuos y su derecho a participar en la construcción de una sociedad más justa donde exista igualdad de oportunidades para todos. (p. 144)

Afro-Hispanic women writers have made an effort to reclaim their identity and value as individuals and their right to participate in the construction of a more just society where equality and opportunities exist for all.

The purpose of my conducting narrative research is to fill a gap where Afro-Latinas’ voices have been historically and are currently underrepresented. Afro-Latin@s not only feel invisible, they also feel drastically misunderstood by their Latin@ and U.S. American counterparts. An Afro-Cuban immigrant residing in Texas relayed the following.

Black Americans first think you're black. Then when they find out you aren't, they're not interested in you. Mexicans think that you're black, but when they hear you speak Spanish, they're sort of shocked. Sometimes, they'll be talking about you thinking that you don't understand! Whites think that you're black until they hear you talk. Then they're confused that you aren't Mexican. (Newby & Dowling, 2007. p. 353)

The previous quote reveals that their counterparts are drawing erroneous conclusions about Afro-Latin@s. Narrative research provides a space for participants to deflate inaccurate assumptions while offering a counter narrative. According to Riessman (1993), "Narrative analysis takes as its object of investigation the story itself" (p. 1). Although this approach may appear to be an oversimplification of the research process, the reality is that "nature and the world do not tell stories, individuals do" (Riessman, 1993, p. 2). While a vigorous and emerging empirical body of research is surfacing, mainly out of Howard University and Duke University to name a few, by comparison there continues to be a limited body of robust publications that privilege the experiences of Afro-Latin@s.

A major discourse must begin both in Latin America and in the United States to break the culture of silence surrounding Afro-Latin@ descendants. Guajardo, Guajardo, and del Carmen Casaperalta (2008) affirmed that by employing different methods, such as narrative analysis, the researcher "ruptures the traditional paradigms and use[s] methods as an instrument for change" (as cited in Guajardo et al, p. 7). Not only did narrative research give my participants the opportunity to use their own voices to tell their own stories, this research undoubtedly helped me to accomplish my ultimate research goal: I aimed to better understand how negotiations of race, class, and gender impacted the lives of Afro-descendants throughout the diaspora and to forge cross-cultural understanding. Given the global age of the 21st century as well as the United States' growing Latino population, incorporating the experiences of Afro-Latin@s offers rich pedagogical opportunities for multiple disciplines.

Narrative Inquiry in the Context of Critical Race Theory

According to Barthes (1977), “In every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and ...nowhere is nor has been a people without a narrative” (Barthes, 1977, p. 79 as cited in Bonilla-Silva, E., Lewis, A., Embrick, D.G., 2004, p. 555). According to Yosso et al. (2001), ‘Critical Race Theory (CRT) centralizes experiential knowledge’ (p. 472-473). There can never be a “challenge of dominant ideology” (Yosso et al., 2001, p. 472) without giving value to the voices of those who remain the “most disenfranchised” (Bonilla-Silva, 2004, p.944).

Illuminating the value of counterstories in CRT for underrepresented groups, Delgado (2000) draws from the narrative traditions of both African-Americans and Latin@s. According to Delgado (2000), “Along with the tradition of storytelling in black culture there exists the Spanish tradition of the picaresque novel or story, which tells of humble folk piquing the pompous or powerful and bringing them down to more human levels” (p. 61). As a woman of African descent, the primary research tradition of my cultural heritage is narrative.

Narrative research not only speaks to who I am, but also to who my ancestors were. As an African-American woman, I come from a lineage that has a rich tradition of storytelling. Beginning with the griots of West Africa, oral tradition has been passed down to African descendants as a primary source of history and genealogy. According to Merriam-Webster,

The griot's role was to preserve the genealogies and oral traditions of the tribe. Griots were usually among the oldest men. In places where written language is the prerogative of the few, the place of the griot as cultural guardian is still maintained.

In my own family, much of our slave history was passed down from my great, great Uncle John. Although I never knew him, my mother often recounted stories that Uncle John told her about his life as a little boy living on slave plantations. These stories have survived in our family over several generations. In subsequent chapters you will find that the role of the griot, although

renegotiated throughout the diaspora, is still very much alive, particularly in the oral history narratives of the Guatemalan respondents. Not only historically, but today “storytelling is central to communication” (Bonilla-Silva et al. 2004, p. 555). Critical Race Theory proclaims that there is a dominant narrative that is constantly at work in the fabric of U.S. social relationships. The dominant narrative excludes the ingroup and sets itself apart from those in the outgroup whereby providing the ingroup “with a form of shared reality in which its own superior position is seen as natural” (Delgado, 2000, p. 60).

In CRT the use of stories, often called counterstories or counternarratives, are essential to opposing the dominant story or the master narrative. Delgado’s (2000) article is titled: *Storytelling for oppositionists and others: A plea for narrative*. Delgado (2000) wrote, “Stories, parables, chronicles, and narratives are powerful means for destroying mindset---the bundle of presuppositions, received wisdoms, and shared understandings against a background of which legal and political discourse takes place” (p. 61). Delgado shies away from theorizing about narratives on the part of researchers, but rather he beseeches researchers to allow participants to tell their stories. “Through counterstorytelling, a foundational precept and methodological tool of CRT scholars can capture, construct, and reveal marginalized experiences while challenging mainstream narratives that readily may be accepted as objective truths” (Horsford, 2011, p. 30). An extension of CRT, feminist theory, also calls upon counterstories to expose sexist hegemonic matrices of oppression.

Narrative Inquiry as a Space for Reclaiming Voice

Black women throughout the diaspora suffer from what Gloria Anzaldúa terms *linguistic terrorism*, a phenomenon by which the dominant culture arrests the words of linguistic minorities as well as the meanings applied to those words because they are deemed to be inferior. Although Anzaldúa is speaking of variations of Spanish, accents, and proper vs. vernacular Spanish

language, this concept can also be applied to the plight of millions of women of color who find themselves “empezando de cero” [starting from point zero] (Criado & Reyes, 2007, p. 145).

Criado and Reyes (2007) spoke poignantly to the *linguistic terrorism* of marginalized women.

Es por ello que las mujeres indígenas, africanas, gitanas, han sufrido una doble marginación y silenciamiento: por ser mujeres y por pertenecer a un grupo racial minoritario. Son como voces aisladas que nunca llegan a encontrarse y que, por desgracia, son pronto olvidadas. (p. 145)

It is for this reason that indigenous, African, and gypsy women have suffered a double marginalization and **silencing**: for being women and for belonging to a minority racial group. They are **isolated voices** that never come to find themselves and that, unfortunately, are **quickly forgotten**.

The silenced, isolated, and forgotten voices of marginalized women must be countered. Scholars are in a position to bring these voices from *margin to center* in a variety of ways. CRT calls for the valuing of experiential knowledge, which is a tool by which educators can provide opportunities to communities “that historically have been excluded and marginalized” (Horsford, 2011, p. 27). According to Hill Collins (2000),

Experience, as a criterion of meaning with practical images as its symbolic vehicles is a fundamental epistemological tenet in African-American thought systems. **Stories, narratives, and Bible principles** are selected for their applicability to the **lived experiences** of African-Americans and have become symbolic representations of a whole wealth of experience. (p. 258)

The goal of my narrative analysis is not to craft a romanticized picture, but rather I hope that the conclusions of the investigation will help to better understand and address cross-cultural relationships as well as intersectional dynamics of race, class, and gender. The conclusions of this study could yield rich pedagogical content that could be incorporated across disciplines. According to Bettez (2012) “Reality is constructed and performed through narrative; it is both constitutive of and constituted by discourse” (p. 31). As I conducted my study using narrative

research methods, I had the opportunity *to listen* to the voices of my respondents in order to articulate the intricacies of their lives.

Social (Co)-Construction of Narratives

In narrative research, participants ultimately decide what to share, what to prioritize, and how much detail to offer. Although told by an individual, stories are not isolated occurrences (Merriam, 2009). Just as my background will influence the way that I perceive and describe the world around me, my participants are also constructing their narratives within a given social context. “Narrative analysis uses the stories people tell, analyzing them in various ways, to understand the meaning of the experiences as revealed in the story” (Merriam, 2009, p. 23). However, it is my responsibility as the researcher to make “meaning of the told story” (Lichtman, 2013, p. 95).

The key to narrative research “is the *use of stories as data*, and more specifically, first-person accounts of experience told in story form having a beginning, middle, and end” (Merriam, 2009, p. 32). “In narrative inquiry, our field texts [and data analysis] are always interpretive” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 85). In order to capture the essence of the participants’ stories, in addition to the audio recording I took notes during the interviews to pen their unspoken cues such as pauses, gazes, laughter, smiles, discomfort, etc. Field texts are necessary to fill in gaps created by memory although they are not necessarily meant to rigidly fix a researcher’s interpretation. “Field texts allow for growth and change rather than fixing relations between fact and idea” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 95).

From the raw data (transcripts & field notes), I looked for emerging codes. From the large selection of codes, I narrowed the codes into more specific categories, being sure to avoid redundancy (Lichtman, 2013). To ground the research further, I sorted the data through thematic analysis. “Thematic analysis relies on categorizing accounts or aspects of accounts that are being

told” (as cited in Lichtman, 2013, p. 256). In thematic analysis one codes for themes (reoccurring patterns), silences and omissions (omitted stories that are common in other related research narratives or findings), outliers (findings in a transcript that may not be present or common in others), slippages (when what is said is in conflict with observable reality) to name a few (Casey, 2011). In analyzing these themes one must take cultural nuances into consideration. For example, African descendants are often more hesitant to speak with strangers regarding painful or emotional occurrences; therefore, some of their omissions or slippages may be better explained within a cultural context. According to Vogel, Wester, & Larson (2007),

Some cultures also hold a value that suggests that the best way to deal with problems is to avoid thinking about them or dwelling on them (Cheng, Leong, & Geist, 1993), which may conflict with the [researcher’s] values of verbal self-disclosure and emotional catharsis (Uba, 1994). It has been reported that in African American culture, for example, “toughing it out” is encouraged during difficult situations (Broman, 1996). (p. 414)

According to Glesne (2011), “Interpretivists consider every human situation as novel, emergent, and filled with multiple, often conflicting, meanings and interpretations. Theoretical work thus becomes observing, eliciting, and describing these meanings and contradictions” (p. 35). Given the interpretivist nature of this study, I aimed to outline relevant conclusions as supported by the data as opposed to seeking finite answers or determinations. The aforementioned strategies were important as I engaged the transcripts and sought to offer the most comprehensive analysis of the told stories. In sync with my research questions, theoretical framework, and literature review, I analyzed the data based on the influence of race, class, and gender.

Some of the themes that were generated from the data include, but are not limited to, the following.

1. Negotiations of Immigration and Class: “I did it for my family.”
2. Negotiations of Race and Identity: *Nationality First*: “I am not Mexican or African-American!”

3. Negotiations of Racism: “[T]here is a lot of racism here.”
4. Negotiations of Gender: ‘Women are now in all spheres.’
5. Negotiations of Beauty: ‘*Pretty* is having long straight hair.’

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS/FINDINGS

African Presence in Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and Panama

The histories of the participants' countries of origin powerfully influenced their narratives and their social identity formations. These historical influences were mostly exhibited in terms of their impact on racial identity and race relations; however, oftentimes race intersected with class formation as well. Seven out of eight participants situated their perspectives of race and class within a historical context. Furthermore, participants often attempted to understand U.S. race, class, and gender dynamics through the backdrop of their respective nation's history. It was clear that history was a meaningful interpretive tool that participants used to frame their world. In sum, not only did their respective Latin American nation's history become a fundamental element in their identity formation, it was also essential to understanding how they came to fashion and make sense of current events both in their home countries and in the United States.

In this regard, as I continued to document my participants' cross-cultural narratives, it was apparent that I would need to gain an understanding of the historical context which they were referencing. For example, the narrations relayed by participants of the vivid animosity between Haitians and Dominicans were somewhat abstract before delving into their histories. Also, certain terminology used by participants proved extraneous until it was situated within a historical frame. One such example is the Panamanian use of the word *chombo*. The meaning of this term came alive only after I understood its historical significance. For the reasons previously stated, subsequently I briefly detail the history of the three nations represented in this study. Without this

overview, I am certain that some of the meanings and nuances of the participants' life stories could be lost or misinterpreted.

African Presence in the Dominican Republic

Although Christopher Columbus first landed on the northern tip of the island of Hispaniola (present day Haiti and Dominican Republic) in 1492, Columbus' older brother Bartholomew claimed the capital city of Santo Domingo in 1496, becoming the first "permanent European settlement" of the New World (Gates, 2011, p. 120). The bitter taste of the African slave trade can be traced to the sweet juices of Caribbean sugarcane. The insurmountable demand for sugar that quickly traversed Latin America demanded the importing of masses of enslaved Africans. As noted in most of the New World settlements, the European conquistadors first used indigenous colonists for slave labor until inhumane work conditions and smallpox, as well as other diseases brought over by the Europeans, annihilated the population. "Within less than 20 years the indigenous population collapsed from an estimated four hundred thousand when Columbus arrived to less than five hundred by 1550" (Gates, 2011, p. 122). Puerto Rican poet, Esmeralda Santiago, penned the heartrending encounter between the two groups.

The borinqueños (Puerto Rican indigenous natives) began to die from diseases they'd never known and from infected wounds opened on their backs and arms and legs from whips they'd never experienced. They died in rebellions, their numbers easily overwhelmed by men on horses carrying sharp swords. They died from exhaustion in the mines processing the shiny nuggets into blocks. They died from terror. (Santiago, 2011, p. 5)

As Europe's insatiable demand for sugar continued to rise, European settlers were faced with the dichotomy of demand versus a "rapidly disappearing labor supply" (Gates, 2011, p. 123). The colonists imported enslaved Africans to bolster the diminishing supply. Enslaved Africans were first trafficked to "the Dominican Republic, then Brazil, then Haiti, and then in Cuba," giving birth to the world's sugar empire (Gates, 2011, p. 123).

Although Santiago's novel explicates the transition from indigenous labor to African labor within a Puerto Rican context, the details are eerily similar to the Dominican Republic. Santiago wrote,

[W]ithin a generation of the arrival of the conquistadores in Puerto Rico during the early sixteenth century, most of the taínos [indigenous population]... had escaped to other islands or were annihilated. To provide an alternative labor force, colonists kidnapped Africans. (Santiago, 2011, p. 85)

Dominican research participant, María, seemed well versed in not only the perils of the African slave trade, but also in how her family lineage is forever marked by it. María explained,

Sí, este color moreno viene de nuestros ancestros africanos. Allá [Dominican Republic] había muchos esclavos africanos. Fueron muchos españoles, españoles allá trajeron muchas esclavas. Hay una frontera con Haití, que pasa mucho, tú sabes, llevaron muchas mujeres para que fueran esclavas y también ellos tenían, tú sabes, los hombres blancos tenían relaciones con las esclavas morenas y por eso venimos mestizo. Venimos de africano y de españoles, la raza.

This brown skin that we have comes from our African ancestors. There were many African slaves in the Dominican Republic. Many Spaniards went there and they brought many female slaves there. There is a border with Haiti, and what often happens, you know, they brought many women to be slaves, and they also, you know, the white men had sexual relations with the black slaves and that is why we came out mixed. Our race comes from both Africans and Spaniards.

Just as we have looked to Europe and to the native population to better understand the African presence in the Dominican, it is equally important to cast your historical gaze to the west to understand how Haiti is also intertwined with Dominican history. The Dominican Republic is the only country in the New World that has gained its independence from another American country. For this reason, Dominicans celebrate their Independence Day based on the island's separation from Haiti in 1844, following a twenty year Haitian occupation. The island of Hispaniola is home to fraternal twins: Haiti to the west and the Dominican Republic to the east. Although connected geographically for over 360 years, the islands might better be described as parasitic twins.

Haiti was colonized by the French; the Dominicans were colonized by the Spanish. In Haiti, people speak Creole; in the Dominican Republic, they speak Spanish. In Haiti, the national sport is soccer; [in the Dominican Republic] the national sport is baseball. In Haiti, the national religion is Voodoo and Roman Catholicism; in the Dominican Republic, it is Roman Catholicism. On the Haitian side of the Massacre River, which divides the two countries, when it is 7:00 a.m., it is 8:00 a.m. on the Dominican side. (Gates, 2011, p. 119)

Not only are the two islands culturally antithetical, but they have a long history of historical, geographical, political, national, and racial opposition. By December of 1821 the Dominican Republic had claimed its independence from Spain, a victory that would be short lived. Years earlier, by 1804, Haiti had received her independence from her French imperialists, becoming the first Black Republic of the New World. Vigilantly observing the unfolding of the Dominican Republic's fight for independence, Haiti became fearful that their European enemies, formerly the French and now the Spanish, might try to invade them from the eastern side of the island. Concluding that the only way to ensure their freedom was to seize control of the Dominican Republic, Haiti came to occupy the Dominican Republic from 1822-1844.

Negotiations of Blackness: From Haitianess to Dominicaness

According to Torres-Saillant (2006), at times the relationship was fairly collaborative between the two islands since the Haitians were able to convince some Dominicans that they were not their direct target, but rather their vulnerability to French and Spanish invaders necessitated the occupation. Some Dominicans even welcomed the protection, while others saw themselves as being forced to trade "one master for another" (Gates, 2011, p. 137). Torres-Saillant (2000) affirmed that the relationship between Haiti and the Dominican Republic "has not always been fraught with animosity, as the preachers of anti-Haitian hatred would have us believe. Beginning in 1860 ...through much of the 19th century, we find a period of collaboration between the two communities" (p. 1093).

No matter how one initially viewed the occupation, most Dominicans would come to detest their Haitian intruders. According to Torres-Saillant (2006), “The Haitian government imposed French as the language of instruction, when it had been Spanish for centuries. They taxed and even appropriated land from the Catholic Church, and the people here were very Catholic. This angered everyone” (as quoted by Gates, 2011, p. 137). Decades of not only Haitian occupation but also *Haitianess* left bitter disdain in the Dominican psyche. When the Dominicans finally liberated themselves from Haitian rule in 1844, they came to reject and to renegotiate all things Haitian, its “culture, its ideas---and to a certain degree, its color. Haiti was black, so, suddenly, black was no good” (Gates, 2011, p. 138). To this end, Torres-Saillant added the following.

The various military attempts of Haitian leaders between 1844 and 1855 to bring Dominicans back under Haitian rule gave rise to a nation-building ideology that included an element of self-differentiation with respect to Haitians. When the job of conceptualizing the new nation fell into the hands of the ideological descendants of the white creole, colonial ruling class, self-differentiation seldom failed to contain a racial component. (Torres-Saillant, 2000, p. 1092)

To add insult to injury, the United States came to occupy Haiti in 1915 and subsequently occupied the Dominican Republic a year later in May of 1916. “The eight years of U.S. occupation from 1916 through 1924, when, their sovereignty lost, they had to obey the rules of a military government of *blancos*, stands out as a crucial period” (Torres-Saillant, 2000, p. 1093). One of the reasons for the U.S. occupation is that as a result of World War I, Europe halted the exports of their sacred sugar supply to the United States. For this reason, the United States expanded production to Dominican sugar plantations to meet the U.S. demand. Faced with the same 15th century dilemma as Columbus, the United States soon realized that they had insufficient labor to meet the demand. Consequently, the U.S. offered meager wages to Dominican laborers; however, Dominicans were unionized by this time and refused to work for

such substandard wages. Thus, by 1920 there were 28,256 recorded Haitians (and likely thousands more undocumented Haitians) that were imported to fill the plantation jobs that Dominicans refused to perform, thereby usurping the Dominicans' union organizing. Already living in object poverty, the Haitians quickly accepted the U.S. offer. It is worth mentioning that the Haitian migrants had very few options given that the U.S. occupation and their appropriation of Haitian lands had left many Haitians homeless and ousted from their farms. Considering the circumstances, migrants had little choice but to become pawns of the United States' sugar empire that happens to have landed prominently on Dominican soil. The United States' tactics planted bitter seeds in the hearts of Dominicans, further fueling their hatred for Haitian migrant workers. According to Torres-Saillant (2006), "The plantation dehumanized Haitian workers. They were reduced to a condition of total destitution. It is then that Dominicans learned to see themselves as superior to Haitians" (as quoted by Gates, 2011, p. 140).

Given that Haitians were often viewed as homogenous in terms of phenotype and especially color, they came to represent a different kind of black than even the darkest Dominicans. "For some Dominicans, black meant poor, desperate, dirty, uneducated, stupid, degenerate. Everything these Dominicans thought about Haitians became what Dominicans thought about blackness" (Gates, 2011, p. 140). During the pilot phase of my dissertation, one participant remarked,

So we're really dysfunctional. In terms of race I think we have amnesia. We choose to have it. We don't wanna (sic) be black. And it stems from uh, I think facing Haiti. It's always been...our identity has always been **in opposition to Haiti**. Race relations in Dominican are a little bit blinded I'd say. (personal communication, March 27, 2013).

By way of a coup, President Rafael Leónidas Trujillo ruled the Dominican Republic with an iron, violent, racist hand from 1930-1961 until he was assassinated. Although the grandson of a Haitian woman, Trujillo further ignited Haitian abhorrence by pinpointing a common enemy

around which the nation could unite: *Haitians*. To conceal his African descent, Trujillo was known to wear white powder on his face and he ordered that his likeness be whitened in all photographs. With the skill and craft of Adolf Hitler, Trujillo too made his populace believe that their problems could be resolved if they simply exterminated the Haitians, thereby creating a white nation state. Allowing his hatred of Haitians to reach its boiling point, and by default his hatred of his own bloodline, in 1937 Trujillo ordered a military attack on all Haitians residing along the Massacre River. Deeming them a threat, his orders were to kill all Haitians living on Dominican soil. Trujillo historian Sabrina María Rivas offered a riveting account of the massacre.

Trujillo's troops arrived and immediately closed the border, trapping Haitians on the Dominican side, at the border town of Dajabón. The Haitians were, rightly, terrified. They knew that many of them were about to die. So they tried to flee across the river. But on the shores and even in the water, Trujillo's forces caught and massacred them. No one really knows how many Haitians died... But the estimates generally put the number at about fifteen thousand. (as paraphrased by Gates, 2011, p. 142).

My Dominican participants in this study shared their experiences of how Haitians are treated in the Dominican today. María and Julia first acknowledged that they have members of their family who have dated Haitians, although none have married them. María and Julia explained that in their family, race does not matter; they simply want their women to settle with good partners who treat them well, regardless of race. María and Julia affirmed, “*todos somos hijos de Dios*” *We are all children of God*. As María and Julia recounted their lived experiences and their observations of how Haitians were persistently denigrated, both women were visibly shaken. My field notes confirmed their discomfort. They shook their heads in disapproval as they spoke on the Haitian condition; their lovely faces turned to marked grimaces of disgust when relaying the abuse suffered by the Haitians at the hands of Dominicans. I noted that they seemed to welcome the opportunity to close this part of the interview and to proceed with a new line of questioning. María's and Julia's observations follow.

María: Con los haitianos sí hay relaciones, pasan mucho a la frontera. Y sí hay muchos haitianos que han nacido allá que viven con dominicanas. Son muy mal vistos, muy mal tratados con nosotros porque los ven lamentablemente muy poca cosa y no debería de ser así por ser morenos.

With the Haitians, yes there are [romantic] relationships, it often happens at the border. And yes many Haitians have been born there [in the Dominican Republic] and they live with Dominican women. They are viewed very poorly, they are treated very poorly by us because they see them unfortunately as less than and it should not be that way simply because you are black.

Julia: Los penalizamos en el sentido de que todos son malos y no todos son malos.

We penalize them in the sense that they are all bad and not all of them are bad.

María: Los humillamos, los damos los peores trabajos, los peores tratos. Les pagamos los peores.

We humiliate them, we give them the worst jobs, the worst treatment. We pay them the worst wages.

Julia: Es racismo. *It's racism.*

María: Sí, es racismo. *Yes, it's racism.*

In my review of the literature the Haitian/Dominican divide is almost always attributed to a rejection of Haitian blackness and all that Haitians have come to represent. Similar to my presentation of this chapter, this divide is typically framed within a historical context. However, María and Julia offered new insights into the Haitian/Dominican divide, albeit equally disparaging. Julia explained that while there is a sense from outsiders that Dominicans only hate or mistreat black Haitians, she insists that the hatred that Dominicans hold against Haitians goes far beyond blackness.

Julia: Aun uno siendo morena o sea que ellos pueden ser más blanco que uno, porque no todos son morenos allá. Hay rubios haitianos, pero desde que se habla de haitiana comoquiera... *Even if you are black, or it may be that they are whiter than someone else, because not every Haitian is black there. There are white/blond Haitians, but due to the fact that they are Haitian however...*

María concludes Julia's thought: Los ven muy poca cosa. *They are seen as less than.*

The Haitian/Dominican binary is often a racialized conversation that presents Haitians as synonymous with blackness. It is rare that anyone offers insights into the perception of white Haitians. Although the perception is equally vilifying, my ears tuned in as my participants broadened the discussion.

In analyzing the discourse of both María and Julia, I noted that they often used the collective first person plural form of *nosotros* (*we*) to convey the treatment of Haitians. For example, *los penalizamos* (*we penalize them*), *los humillamos* (*we humiliate them*), *les pagamos los peores* (*we pay them the worst wages*). Although they considered themselves compassionate and highly accepting of Haitians, their use of the first person plural connotes a desire (be it conscious or subconscious) to take a corporate responsibility on behalf of Dominican culture and society. The use of the collective also demonstrates that although Julia and María may have different mindsets from their Dominican compatriots, their discourse reveals that they understand that they too are privileged by Haitian oppression.

Contrariwise, the third Dominican participant, Blanca, seemed to offer ambivalent conclusions about race relations in the Dominican. Although she was less reserved when speaking of individuals who may have racist tendencies, Blanca appeared to distance herself from overtly presenting a racist Dominican Republic. I asked Blanca if she had observed racism towards blacks or towards Haitians during her time spent in the Dominican. Blanca lived in the Dominican until she was 35 years old. Blanca communicated that she had observed no such mistreatment in the country as a whole, although she did reveal that her maternal relatives, who were of Arabic/Lebanese descent, were racist. I also asked her if she felt there was a preference for whiteness in the Dominican. Blanca's response follows.

Yo, no [he observado eso], nosotros no [somos racistas] [Field note: Responds with a mark of confusion as if she cannot believe that I would pose such a question.] En Santo Domingo no he encontrado ninguna preferencia para blanqueamiento. **De así de que no**

puedo decirte nada malo. Siento mi país es bonito, la gente muy acogedora.

Entiendes. Pero la raza de mi mamá era bien racista. De parte de mi mamá son como libaneses. Y mi abuela es libanesa y ellos son racistas, no les gustan los morenos. Pero mi abuela tuvo un esposo moreno, pero en su raza como que no les gustaba mucho. Pero mis hermanas están casadas con morenos. Es aceptable en mi familia [ahora]. Mi familia es moreno y blanco (sic).

I have not [observed what you described], we are not [racist]. [Field note: Responds with a mark of confusion as if she cannot believe that I would pose such a question.] In Santo Domingo I have not found any preference for whiteness. **[Of the Dominican] I really cannot say anything bad about it. I feel my country is beautiful, the people are very welcoming.** You understand? But my mom's race is very racist. My mom's side is Lebanese. And my grandmother is Lebanese and they are racists who do not like blacks. But my grandmother had a black husband. But in her race they did not like it very much. But my sisters are married to blacks. It is acceptable in my family [today]. My family is black and white.

Interestingly, the only racism that Blanca conveyed happened to come from outside of the country by way of her immigrant relatives, but she never presented racism as a mark endemic of Dominican culture. Unlike María and Julia, during my interviews with Blanca it appeared that she found it difficult to speak critically of the Dominican. As a white Dominican perhaps Blanca had been spared from many of the nation's harsh realities, or perhaps, to echo her words, she simply "cannot say anything bad" about her homeland.

In terms of the transversal nature of race and class, Blanca shared that she was of a middle class Dominican family that fared quite well. Intersecting Blanca's white skin privilege with her class background, it is understandable how she may have been shielded from racism and may even have enjoyed the "luxury of obviousness" (Johnson, 2006, p. 121).

Negotiations of Migration: From the Dominican Republic to the United States Mainland

Political crises of the 1960s were widespread in many nations including the independence movements of various African nation-states, the Civil Rights Movement of the United States, and the student political protests of Mexico leading to the tragedy of La Guerra Sucia (The Dirty War) to name a few. The Dominican Republic was not exempt during these tumultuous times.

“Dominicans began to migrate in large numbers to the U.S. after the American invasion of the island in 1965. Migration was seen then by both the American and Dominican government as a way to relieve political and social pressures” (Itzigsohn, 2004, p. 45). Due to political pressures in the Dominican Republic and the instability of their government, to protect U.S. political and investment interests the United States welcomed Dominican immigrants in the decades of the 60s and 70s. Later the Dominican Republic was hit by a debt crisis, precipitating a second wave of immigration in the 1980s. As a result, the flow of immigrants was induced by economic pressures as opposed to mostly political pressures. “There was a dispersion of Dominican immigrants across several cities of the Eastern board of the United States. While slightly more than half of the Dominican population in the United States is still located in New York,” New York Dominicans have dispersed to several other U.S. cities including Rhode Island, New England, and Florida (Itzigsohn, 2004, p. 46). Today, the Dominican immigrant population has risen substantially. According to the 2000 U.S. Census report there were 764,945 Dominican immigrants in the United States, constituting about 2.2% of the U.S. population. By the 2010 U.S. Census the number had risen to 1, 414, 703 (2.8% of population), an increase in migration from the year 2000 to 2010 of 84.9% (Ennis et al (2011).

My Dominican participants have diverse migration narratives. Most of them have a common thread of having been forced to leave their homelands due to economic pressures and the hope of opportunities elsewhere; however, their methods, routes, and specific purposes of migration vary greatly. First, Blanca explained that she had a good life in the Dominican Republic and felt she was economically stable. Although she had a positive economic and social upbringing in the Dominican, she admits that there are more opportunities for mobility here in the United States.

Blanca explained that she only immigrated to the United States because her first husband and the father of her children had come to North Carolina to work. Blanca entered the United States in 2002 at the age of 35 as a documented legal resident along with her two children. North Carolina is the only state in which she has resided. Following her divorce, she decided to remain in the United States because she had already built a life here, her children were here, and she later remarried. I asked Blanca what most surprised her upon arriving to the United States. Now 47 years old, Blanca responded,

El sistema, todo es diferente. Como se andan aquí el orden, manejando todo eso, es más organizado y el cuidado de las personas mayores, los niños, todo eso. Para mí eso es muy bonito. Que aquí les da mucha prioridad a las personas mayores. Cosa que en mi país yo ya no consigo trabajo con la edad mía.

The system, everything is different. How they keep everything in order here, managing all of it, it is more organized and the care of older people and children, all of that. For me, this is very beautiful. Here they give much priority to older people. If I were still in my country I would not be able to find work at my age.

The immigration story of my next Dominican participant, María, is much more complex than that of Blanca. María was colorfully energetic and eager to share her story from our first encounter in the restaurant. She shared that she had always known that someone would one day tell her life story to the world. Her story is full of adventure, grief, sorrow, pain, joy, and the “American Dream.” Although I was honored to serve as a catalyst in propelling María’s vision forward, simultaneously I contemplated the level of accountability that had been entrusted to me. Although I understand the degree of integrity with which I must craft the stories of all of my participants, I felt a greater sense of responsibility with María’s story. Her life story was her treasured gift that she was willing to bequeath to me, not for recognition or glory, but for the benefit of spreading a message of triumph and hope to others. I have cautiously conveyed her narrative with the purest, most respectful scholarship.

A young 26 year old María was the first brave soul in her family to leave her beloved homeland. Notwithstanding her youth, María's voyage is laced with the makings of the most sensational Hollywood movie. Her migration opened the doors to kidnapping, drug cartels, arranged marriage, and even homelessness. María's journey would take her from the Dominican Republic, to Puerto Rico, to Florida, to New York, and finally to the place that she now calls home: North Carolina. María's immigration exploits follow, albeit not necessarily chronologically.

Al principio vine en yola a Puerto Rico por el hecho de que quería superarme, vengo de una familia muy pobre y quise probar suerte. Como dominicana llegué ilegal, me casé con un boricua, me hizo mis papeles y de allí fui a Miami y he pasado mucho trabajo, tú sabes, pero conseguí mis papeles y yo sé que intenté cinco veces venir en una yola y me cogieron cuatro veces presa y hasta que a las cinco llegué. Y cuando llegué a un monte en Puerto Rico y allí me secuestraron las drogadictas para poder conseguir a mis familiares que les pagaron en dólares para dejarme salir. Sí, una historia bien larga, muy complicada, en serio. Y bueno llegué como muchos llegaron. Entonces pidieron rescate y me pagaron mi rescate y llegué a Puerto Rico sin nada. No conocí a nadie allí.

In the beginning I came in a small sailboat to Puerto Rico because I wanted to better myself. I come from a very poor family and I wanted to try my luck. As a Dominican I arrived in Puerto Rico illegally, I married a Puerto Rican, he got me papers and from there I went to Miami where I worked very hard, you know, but I got my papers. I know that I tried five times to come by boat and they captured me and put me in jail and it wasn't until the 5th time that I arrived. And when I arrived at a mountain [in Puerto Rico], there the drug addicts kidnapped me to be able to get my family members to pay them in dollars to let me go. Yes, it's a long story, very complicated, seriously. Well, I arrived like many arrive. So they demanded a ransom, [my family] paid my ransom and I arrived in Puerto Rico with nothing. I didn't know anyone there.

Similar to how many Haitians see the Dominican Republic as the land of opportunity, countless Dominicans traverse the 237 miles of the Caribbean Sea to reach the neighboring island of Puerto Rico, a U.S. Commonwealth. To the disdain of many Puerto Ricans, their ports are often the gateway that Dominican immigrants use to set sail or flight to the United States' mainland.

María's poignant narrative strokes the keys of a melancholy dirge. We may never know the details of what came of a young, attractive woman in her mid-twenties when she landed in the hands of drug addicts in the isolated mountains of Puerto Rico. As María conveyed her narrative, it was evident that the kidnapping marked a time of great distress. Out of respect for her pain, I chose not to ask any follow-up questions regarding the kidnapping. María revealed that although her arranged marriage was to a good man who treated her well, it was not a marriage of love; but rather the marriage symbolized her courtship with another great suitor, the coveted United States of America. Next, María gave extraordinary details about her plight to survive life in Puerto Rico before having received her papers. María shared the following.

Bueno, conseguí trabajo y me fui a casa de una amiga, la amiga me tuvo que echar a la calle porque yo era indocumentada. Después me fui a la casa de mi hermana, que era mi hermana de padre. Me dijo que no me podía tener porque yo era muy joven y ella tenía esposo, entonces me tiró. Ella no quería competencia entonces me tiró sin dinero. Lo que trabajé se lo di a ella a ahorrar para reunir dinero para pagar para que me hicieran papeles, y se quedó con mi dinero. Y bueno fui a buscar trabajo, que supuestamente era un salón de belleza y era de masaje de prostituta. Entonces no acepté y me tuve que irme de allí. Me fui a una casa de otra amiga mía y el marido me enamoraba, bueno hasta que tuve que casarme con un señor con nada más 26 años. Irme a su casa, sin sentir amor, pero tenía un hogar estable. Y bueno, me pude casar con él y él me hizo los papeles. Pasé mucho trabajo porque no lo quería, no sentía nada por él. Después fui a un lugar de ancianos donde él mismo trabajaba. Y para mí fue muy trágico porque tenía que limpiar mierda con ancianos pero hasta que yo me acostumbré. Pero gracias a él tuve mis papeles. Con los papeles me fui a Miami a vivir.

Well, I found work and I went to live at a friend's house, but my friend had to throw me out because I was undocumented. Thereafter I went to my sister's house; she was my sister on my father's side. She said that she could not lodge me because I was very young and she had a husband, so she [eventually] threw me out. She didn't want competition so she threw me out with no money. The money that I saved from working I gave to her so that she could save money in order to pay for me to get papers, but she kept my money. So I left to find work in what was supposedly a beauty salon, but it was actually a prostitution massage parlor. I didn't accept the position. From there I went to live with another friend of mine, but her husband fell in love with me until I had to marry this other man when I was only 26 years old. I went to his home, without feeling any love for him, but I had a stable place to live. So I married him and that's how I got my papers. It was very difficult for me because I didn't love him. I didn't feel anything for him. Afterwards I went to a retirement home where my husband was working. It was a tragic situation

because I had to clean feces off of the old people, but I eventually got used to it. But thanks to him, I got my papers and with those papers I went to live in Miami.

María encapsulates her narrative with a fitting metaphor. “Entonces para mí fue un choque muy grande mi historia. Yo vengo de inocente, una muchacha de Santo Domingo no sé cómo es la vida, y me metieron prácticamente a un patíbulo” *So for me my story was a huge shock. I come as an innocent girl from Santo Domingo who does not know about life, and they practically condemned me to the gallows.* The gallows was an instrument used for torture before a hanging execution. María landed in calamitous circumstances with dire outcomes, largely due to her being a woman of low means.

I was struck by the gendered nature of María’s narrative. If she were a man, would she have been captured for ransom so easily? Were she a man, what is the likelihood that she would have been evicted by a jealous spouse simply based on her youthful desirability? Would there have been either the expectation or the offer to work as a prostitute? Would she have been forced to marry for papers? Would she have held an occupation that required her to be a caregiver, such as her post in the retirement home? Certainly, each of these illustrations could be experienced by men; however, they are by and large tangible experiences and abuses faced by women immigrants. Sexism disproportionately affects women. With almost half of Latin@ immigrants working in the United States being women, Eggerth, DeLaney, Flynn, and Jacobson (2012) conducted a qualitative study to research the work experiences of Latina women immigrants. Eggerth et al. (2012) concluded, “Latina workers...live within a complex web of stressors, both as workers and as women” whereby they experience “many opportunities for exploitation, especially if they are undocumented” (p. 13). To this end, Afro-Puerto Rican novelist Santos-Febres relayed similar exploits on the part of her Afro-Puerto Rican protagonist, Isabel, in the novel *Our Lady of the Night*.

Our Lady of the Night problematized socially constructed roles for women as mandated by society. Santos-Febres (2009) questioned the pre-determined social location of the black woman in early 20th century Puerto Rico. She also deconstructed traditional values such as motherhood, the definition of love, sexism, sex, and both selected and prescribed paths to upward mobility. Isabel's character is adversarial to all hegemonic ideologies. She supersedes society's expectations for a black woman, but yet she simultaneously acquiesces to historical stereotypes such as the black woman as concubine and sexually unrestrained. Aware of the inherent disadvantages of Isabel being black, female, and poor, Isabel's Godmother & legal guardian devises a plan.

When Godmother's brother, Maruca Morena, begins to look upon Isabel with a lascivious eye, the Godmother knows that it will only be a matter of time before she is violated. "We have to get [Isabel] out of here, before something terrible happens" (Santos-Febres, 2009, p. 47). This scene is a foreshadowing of how Isabel's beauty, class, and gender will not only put her at risk in her own home, but also in white, male-dominated society. Throughout the novel the black girl's body is constant prey in a world of men.

Afro-Puerto Rican scholar Cruz-Janzen (2001) prefers the term *Latinegra* to describe a woman "of obvious black ancestry and undeniable ties to Africa" (p. 168). According to Cruz-Janzen (2001), "General cultural devaluation of females sets Latinegras additionally at risk" (p. 178). Cruz-Janzen (2001) explained Puerto Rican society's expectations for a girl like Isabel. "Latinegras have been socialized, through generations, to accept their inferiority to all men and whites. As occupants of the lowest rungs on the social ladder, they are looked down upon, expected to be docile, subservient, uneducated, and ignorant" (p. 170). As a young girl, it is evident that in some ways Isabel accepts that she will forever be resigned to life as a domestic, but defiantly she also aims to do what few black girls of her era are doing, learning to read and

write. This spark of ambition reveals that Isabel wants something more than her lineage has bestowed. Radical for the time was Isabel's declaration, "I want to be a woman of means, start my own business" (Santos-Febres, 2009, p. 91). Like Isabel, my Dominican participant, María, also had ambitions to be a business owner.

Concomitant to Isabel's declaration, María refused to remain at the sidelines of society. She was determined to open doors for herself and for her family. Not only would María's ambitions change her course, but also that of her aunt Julia, another of my Dominican participants.

From the Dominican Republic, to Europe, to the United States

Although she is fourteen years her junior, Julia is María's maternal aunt. Throughout the interview Julia displayed a contagious sense of humor. She regularly interspersed jokes and laughter into her narrative. Her humor was a welcomed break from some of the more staid content that we covered. Julia's story of migration began at the young age of 19. She left Santo Domingo for Spain where she was lodged by relatives. Julia went to Spain's bustling capital of Madrid in search of a better life.

Spain was easier to navigate in terms of the language and also the migratory process was easier than coming to the United States. Julia lived in Madrid for about 12 years. There, she had a series of jobs, but mostly worked in hair salons. Julia found Spain to be a welcoming country to immigrants and she felt she was treated well. Julia explained that the impetus for her departure from Spain to the U.S. was the same as that of her departure from her birthplace: economic paucity.

Of the current economic crisis in Spain, Julia remarked. "En España está difícil económicamente, España ya no es lo mismo que antes." *In Spain, the economic situation is very difficult; Spain is not the same as before.* Julia went on to explain the working conditions in

Spain. “Y ya no respetan al trabajador. Entonces, yo no quiero vivir así. Si quiere te pagan, y si quieren sí o no, entonces pues. Es que todos los españoles están inmigrando.” *They do not respect their workers. So, I did not want to live like that. If they wish they pay you. It all depends if they want to pay you or not. That’s why all the Spaniards are immigrating.* Julia then explained the mass exodus out of Spain on the part of both nationals and immigrants alike. She stated that due to economic hardship, many are desperately fleeing to neighboring countries such as Switzerland, France, and Italy.

Julia remarked that while in flight to the United States she met several Spaniards who were also leaving Spain for the United States. Unfortunately, Julia found that a number of them did not have the proper visas and paperwork and were not permitted to remain in the country. Julia, however, came to the United States with documentation and has resided in North Carolina for about one year. In comparison to María’s tumultuous story of immigration to the United States, Julia commented.

La mía (la historia) fue bien fácil pues. Ella (María) me llamó, se puso en contacto. Yo estuve en España y ella me llamó para que viniera a trabajar en su salón. Entonces, la cosa está muy mal en España. Pues sí vine y la verdad he tenido todo. No me puedo quejar porque [tengo] casa y comida, María te ayuda tanto, y con trabajo también. La verdad es que no he tenido experiencia [negativa] aquí, todo es bonito.

My story was very easy. María called me, she contacted me, I was in Spain and she called me to come and work in her salon. Well, things were getting really bad in Spain. So I came and the truth is that I have had everything. I cannot complain because I have a home, food, María helps you so much, and I have a job also. The truth is I have not had a [negative] experience here. Everything is beautiful.

María’s salon has served to advance the careers of many of her Dominican relatives. In addition to Julia, María had two other cousins to move to North Carolina from Florida to work in her salon. They were residing with Julia until they were able to move into their own apartment. All of these women were grateful to Julia and were eager to start over. María was committed to

ensuring that other Dominican immigrants would never have to suffer the abuse that she endured. Throughout this study, I was moved by María's benevolence and goodwill. In alignment with the tenets of BTF, María was concerned about the mobility of the entire family. Her support of her family, both domestic and abroad, never faltered.

African Presence in Guatemala

Excerpt from "I Rise" by Dr. Maya Angelou

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

After 300 years of domination, the Black Caribs continued to triumph and to resist their oppressors. Like the narrative voice of Dr. Angelou's poem, *like air, they rose*. To understand how the African presence materialized in Guatemala, one must first journey to the islands of the Caribbean, specifically to the West Indian island of Saint Vincent in the Lesser Antilles. Christopher Columbus landed in the translucent waters of the Caribbean Sea near the end of the 15th century. There, Columbus and his men found two indigenous groups inhabiting most of the islands: the Arawak and the Caribs. Both groups were migrants from the South American mainland. Although the Arawak had settled in the island as a sovereign people group since 1000 A.D., they were often uprooted by the Caribs resulting from battles over land and territory. "In the early 16th century, many Arawak worked as forced labor in mines, where they perished from overwork, starvation, and disease" (Kerns, 1989, p. 20). Observing the deplorable conditions of the natives, Friar Bartolomé de las Casas became the most celebrated *defensor de los indígenas* (defender of the natives). He successfully advocated for the eradication of forced indigenous

Note: The literary review refers to indigenous settlers to the Caribbean as Red Caribs, Yellow Caribs, and Island Caribs, all of which are cited in this chapter. Subsequently, scholars and writers identified the enslaved Africans who were shipwrecked in the Caribbean as Black Caribs, Africans, and later as Garifuna. All terms are used in this chapter.

labor, becoming a central catalyst for the Spanish crown to end indigenous servitude in 1550. Las Casas made an ominous exchange, the lives of the natives for the backs of the Africans. “Friar Bartolomé de las Casas found their condition so pitiful that he was moved to advise the use of African labor instead” (Kerns, 1989, p. 20). Later in the 17th century, although not undisputed, it is commonly reported in 17th century documents that a Spanish vessel (some documents report two vessels) that was carrying African slaves shipwrecked (Gonzalez, 1969; Kerns, 1989). Following the shipwreck, the Africans became distressed due to a dearth of food and water supplies. “The *Yellow* Caribs... rescued the Africans from their plight and invited them to the mainland of St. Vincent, an invitation which was accepted” (Marshall, 1973, p. 6). Apparently, Saint Vincent was well reported amongst both free and enslaved blacks to be a haven for runaways. Shortly after the shipwreck, enslaved blacks, particularly those from Barbados, began fleeing to find refuge among the new African arrivals and the *Yellow* Caribs. Given the horrific deaths of the natives under Spanish rule, the Africans quickly came to outnumber their indigenous neighbors. The Africans and natives intermingled and the Africans adopted some aspects of the *Yellow* Carib language, while retaining much of their native African culture. Today, the Black Caribs, or the Garífuna,

...are a Negro people who speak an Amerindian language with many French loan words and bear Spanish surnames for the most part. They are a people who have been immersed in many cultural streams without being submerged in any one of them. (Hadel, 1976, p. 84).

The fairly collaborative relationship that the *Yellow* and Black Caribs previously enjoyed quickly disintegrated. Their history is plagued with decades of land disputes and battles which often ended in capturing dissidents from the opposing side. Pere Labat (1970) learned,

It is not possible for the [Yellow] Caribs to rescue them, as the negroes, who are a much braver race and in far superior numbers, only laugh at them, ill-treat them, and possibly will one day make them work as their slaves. (as quoted by Kerns, 1989, p. 23)

When he visited St. Vincent in the year 1700, Jean-Baptiste Labat recorded that he found that the “Negroes had become quite powerful ...and that the Caribs feared and resented them” (p. 137).

However, the same author later gives a somewhat contradictory account, stating that his ship was met by both Negroes and Caribs, “all of whom were in similar dress and paint” perhaps showing some degree of comradery (as quoted by Gonzalez, 1969, p. 18-19).

Jean-Baptiste Labat (1970) also gave vivid physical descriptions of the distinct groups noting that despite their similar attire, “it was not difficult to distinguish the Caribs from the Negroes because of the hair form; and in addition they were differentiated by the look of their heads, by their eyes, their mouths, and their corpulence, in all of which respects the ones differ greatly from the other” (as quoted by Gonzalez, 1969, p. 19).

The nature of the relationship between the Africans and the natives remains ambiguous. “In the process of time relations between the Black and the indigenous Yellow Caribs became strained and in 1710 the Governor of the French island of Martinique, who acted as arbitrator, divided the island between both groups,” assigning the Yellow Caribs the Leeward side and the Black Caribs the Winward side of the island (Marshall, 1973, p. 6-7). Later the French and the British would learn that the Leeward side was barely cultivatable, in contrast “the Winward side was the most extensive and finest part of the island” (Marshall, 1973, p. 8). Although the Black Caribs were inhabiting and later protecting the good land that the French arbitrator had rightfully assigned to them, the revelation of how profitable the Black Carib land was would soon become the root of fierce battles antagonized and instigated by the Europeans (the French and the British respectively).

In addition to the infighting amongst the native populations and the resulting animosity between the Africans and the natives, “the early history of the West Indies is one of conquest and displacement, with Spanish against English, English against French, civil authorities against freebooters, Europeans against Indians, maroons against planters” (Kerns, 1989, p. 19). Eager to use the land to capitalize on the world’s growing sugarcane market, from the 17th century and well into the 18th century there was constant turbulence between the British and the French over the possession of St Vincent. By 1763 the French and the British had finally settled their long standing territorial dispute over the island of St. Vincent. “By the Treaty of Paris, St. Vincent assumed the status of a British possession. But despite its formal political status, the French retained dominance, both in influence and numbers, in St. Vincent” (Kerns, 1989, p. 23).

The British adamantly believed that one must conquer or be conquered. “The colonists, of course, equated society with hierarchy” (Kerns, 1989, p. 26). Not only did the Black Caribs reject this axiom within their community but they also vehemently rejected it “in relation to the British colonists and king” (Kerns, 1989, p. 26). “The Reds no longer posed any threat to Europeans, who described [them] as innocent and timid” (Kerns, 1989, p. 23). However, the Black Caribs “were apparently not so easily wooed by French favors as the Reds. They showed no intention of surrendering their land” (Kerns, 1989, p. 25-26). While the natives were agreeable to occupying a certain side of the island, while allowing the French to seize portions of their land, the Black Caribs would not allow any dispossession of their land by the Europeans. Sometimes with the aid of and at other times in opposition to the French, the Black Caribs fought for centuries to keep their land. Conversely, the Black Caribs never had a harmonious relationship with the British. Kerns (1989) wrote, “No doubt *their* [the Black Caribs’] refusal to part with any portion of their territory seemed both unreasonable and perverse, blocking as it did the development of sugar plantations by eager British capitalists” (p. 26). Although in the previous

quote Kerns (1989) is merely restating the probable supposition of the British, the reports written by Europeans from the period, and later by historians and anthropologists, often paint the Black Caribs in a negative light or as aggressors.

I trouble this recount of history that seeks to deride a community for refusing to idly accept their own conquest. I do not condemn the Black Caribs for launching strategies to ensure their autonomy. “Certainly, enslaved and free people of color defied slavery and colonialism by winning positions of respect within a racist system that denied their ability to be loyal, or by engaging in sustained, armed insurrections against slavery” (O’Toole, 2013, p. 1103). Scholar Bernard Marshall also troubled the representation of Black Caribs behaving badly. “It is indeed hard to see how the refusal of the Black Caribs or a people to give up what is legitimately theirs could be construed as contumacy” (Marshall, 1973, p. 13). Commensurately, Gonzalez (1990) contended, “But as the British continued to squeeze them, the Caribs persisted in defending what was left of their territory against road building, timber destruction, and the establishment of new plantations by the British (p. 32).

In 1786 the Black Caribs aided their French allies in capturing St. Vincent; however, the French returned the conquest back to the British only one year later. The Black Caribs were fiercely determined to maintain control of their land, leading to a full-scale battle in 1795 led by their chief, Chatoyer. Unfortunately, Chatoyer fell in battle, leaving the Black Caribs vulnerable. As a result, the British proceeded with a long-contemplated plan to exile the Black Caribs. “Five thousand were transported to Roatán, an island off the coast of Honduras, and left there with a supply ship filled with provisions and agricultural implements” (Kerns, 1989, p. 27). However, Gonzalez (1990) painted a less munificent portrait of the Black Caribs’ deportation. “[T]he British abandoned the Black Caribs on the nearly deserted and uninviting island of Roatán” (p. 33). The Black Caribs later left Roatán for the mainland, as their ancestors had done when

shipwrecked in the Caribbean (notwithstanding a divergence of precipitating circumstances), the majority of the Black Caribs settled in present day Honduras, Belize (then known as British Honduras), Nicaragua, and Guatemala. Having self-governed and having warded off the Europeans for over 300 years, the Black Carib exiles had come to be an industrialized, resourceful people.

In Central America, they earned sustenance by fishing, raising game, hunting, and trading. Women often took responsibility for cultivating the fields. Additionally, several European visitors to the islands during that time reported “most of the men [and women] are able to talk Carib, Spanish, and English; some even add Creole-French and Mosquito” (as quoted by Kerns, 1989, p. 32-33). Along with shepherding, hunting, trading, and linguistic skills, the Black Caribs were also highly mobile and impeccable sailors. According to Squier (1870), they readily earned a reputation as a “good and useful laboring population” (as quoted by Kerns, 1989, p. 32). Regardless of the early success of the Black Caribs, the next three centuries of domination would prove unyielding.

Negotiations of History: The “Official” Story vs. Oral History Narratives

In order to better understand the historical context of the narratives of my participants, I invested countless hours into learning the history of their native lands. It was advantageous that I did so in order to better contextualize their accounts. I quickly learned that not only was it necessary to delve into the histories of my participants’ homelands, but also to understand how interconnected histories are. For example, I found it impossible to fully comprehend the history of the *Garífunas* (formerly known as Black Caribs) in Guatemala without understanding the history of the islands of the Caribbean, namely Dominica and Saint Vincent while also perusing the histories of their European invaders, the French, British, and the Spanish. With all of my participants, I noticed points of both convergence and divergence between published, *official*

historical records, vs. oral histories. In the case of the Garífuna participants, who had limited access to formal education in their home countries, I was enlightened to find how congruent their oral histories were given that the typical Garífuna school only went to the 6th grade.

Before the interview formally began, my 80 year old Garífuna participant, Eufemia, did not delay in making me aware of her origins and of the source of her oral history. Eufemia declared, “Los Garífuna vienen de África, el centro de África, Ghana. Nos identificamos como africana, o lo que nos han contado nuestros ancestros.” *The Garífuna people come from Africa, the center of Africa, Ghana. We identify as African, or that is what our ancestors have told us.* Most historical accounts that I have unearthed are ambiguous as to the African point of origin of the Garífuna. These accounts tend to simply state that the enslaved Africans were coming from West Africa, or even from Africa but by way of Spain. Surprisingly, Eufemia was certain of her origins and she held full confidence in the teachings of her ancestors. One of the most noted Garífuna anthropologists, Nancie Gonzalez (1990) made many references to West African origins when explaining from whence the Garífuna warrior tactics had come. Although I have yet to read an account that pinpoints the Garífuna’s point of origin to any specific African country, it is not unreasonable to think that Ghana could be their mother country given that Ghana was one of the main slave trafficking hubs during the colonial era, and it is centrally located in West Africa. Lying just above the equator, Ghana would be a straight navigational route from West Africa to the Caribbean, or from Spain due south. Eufemia has proven that although she may have come from ancestors who did not have access to the printed word, they craftily sketched their history in the fine repertoires of the Garífunas’ collective memory.

Negotiations of Migration: From Livingston, Guatemala to New York

Following the deportation of the Black Caribs (*Garífuna*), the Ladinos (Spanish speaking population descended from Spaniards and indigenous groups) soon controlled the land, the

government, and access to power on the Central American coast. As the islands where the Garífuna now called home changed hands several times between the Spanish and the British, the Black Caribs were isolated to specific communities with fewer opportunities for mobility and advancement. Due to their isolation, men were often forced to leave home to enter either neighboring villages or the city to find work. “[H]orticulture and fishing [were] important ways of maintaining those who remained...primarily women, children, older persons and men who were “in between” jobs elsewhere” (Gonzalez, 1979, p. 261). The long absences by Black Carib men to find work in other lands caused the family structure to disintegrate. By the 1950s it appears that migration was of great necessity. Few Black Carib youth knew how to fish or they simply disdained the work. Much of the agricultural savvy that had once sustained the villages was now lost due to constant migration and an absence of the most able-bodied men. These very circumstances, coupled with widespread discrimination, led my Garífuna participants to immigrate to the perceived land of *milk and honey*, the United States of America.

I asked Elisa why she decided to immigrate to the United States. She explained that she had a brother who had immigrated before her and he was fairing very well in New York. After witnessing his advancement, she too decided to follow him in 1983 when she was just 18 years old. When I asked why she felt she could not advance in Guatemala, Elisa explained the pervasive discrimination suffered by the Garífuna people in education and employment. Unequal and inequitable access to employment was commonly reported by my participants throughout the diaspora. Concomitantly, Gonzalez (1979) reported that Garífunas in Guatemala worked “in a labor market which discriminated against them” (p. 257). As I previously reported of the Dominicans, by 1975 there was a fairly distinct exodus out of Livingston, Guatemala. At the time when Gonzalez surveyed about 25% of the households in Livingston, she found that 166 relatives were listed as “absent” and, of these, 66 were women. This is a stark change from previous

decade's research (Kerns & Gonzalez respectively) which revealed that men were typically the ones to migrate while women remained in the home. "Fifty-eight of the total number of immigrants were in the United States, and the greatest numbers of these resided in New York" (Gonzalez, 1979, p. 258). It seems that since Garífuna men were often the first to migrate, as in the case of my participants, they later extended open doors to their families, including the female members. According to the U.S. Census, contemporary data reveals that the number of Guatemalan immigrants increased from 372,487 in 2000 to 1,044,209 in 2010, constituting an increase of 180.3% over the 10 year period (Ennis et al, 2011).

I asked Elisa what surprised her upon arrival to the United States. Elisa emphatically responded that she was most surprised to find "igualdad, igualdad, igualdad!" *Equality, equality, equality!* Her response is largely tied to her lived experiences with discrimination in the workplace in Guatemala. I asked Elisa to elaborate further on what she meant by *igualdad*, to which she responded,

[Hay] igualdad de trabajo y de expresión. Libre expresión, tú tienes derecho a hablar. No hay discriminación en el trabajo. Cualquier persona puede conseguir trabajo en cualquier lado. Yo sinceramente me alegro mucho, me sentí feliz al ver la gente incapacitada trabajando, en mi país no se ve eso.

There is equality in employment and equality of expression. Free expression, you have the right to speak. There is no discrimination in employment. Any person can get a job anywhere. It sincerely makes me very happy, I was happy to see handicapped people working, in my country you would not see that.

Both Elisa and Blanca conveyed similar appreciation with regard to the U.S. workforce. Both women felt opportunities for employment would be denied them in their home countries. However, as an African-American woman born and raised in the U.S. South, Elisa's words gave me pause. Although no one can deny that a great deal of progress has been made in the United States toward equal opportunity in the workplace, most would agree that there is still work to be

done. Based on multiple factors I would have described the U.S. employment practices as discriminatory. As a member of the Academy I observe daily the low or non-existent number of full professors of color in our U.S. institutions of higher learning. Relatedly, of Hill Collins' work (1989), White (1995) recognized "the need to struggle for increased space within the academy for African American scholars" and she agreed with Collins' (1989) assessment that there is a "narrow-minded failure of many academic departments to take Afrocentric scholars seriously and to give African Americans tenure. These experiences caused me to first receive Elisa's complimentary accolades of the U.S. workplace with skepticism; but I quickly surmised that her comments had their proper place when analyzed through the lens of her lived experiences.

In the case of Elisa, she was able to readily observe overt racism in her native land which closed the doors of opportunity to employment and education squarely in the face of the Garífuna community; however, upon entering the seemingly open doors of employment with relative ease in the U.S., she was unable to recognize any signs of subtle racism that might have confronted her. Also, given the extreme racial exclusion experienced by Elisa in her homeland, her point of comparison for racism and discrimination is analyzed from the backdrop of binary positioning: Guatemala vs. the United States. Given such a dynamic point of comparison, it is difficult for Elisa to analyze her U.S. experiences without the backdrop of Guatemala, a land which represents the epitome of racism and discrimination for her.

Elisa and her mother Eufemia both spoke of the lack of educational opportunities afforded to the Garífuna people in Guatemala. However, Eufemia was grateful to a kind white U.S. American missionary who came to Livingston, built a school, and allowed four of her seven children to attend on scholarship. The only ray of hope for her family in Guatemala hailed from *the land of opportunity*. Later, when her sons began to immigrate to the United States, this was the first time that anyone in her family saw financial prosperity. Again, the light at the end of a

very dark tunnel shone brightly from the United States. Now that there are established relatives who have roots in the United States, Eufemia explained the impact that U.S. migration has had on her family.

Y ahora se han adelantados, ha avanzado la raza por los familiares que están aquí en Los Estados Unidos. Les han ayudado a los jóvenes allá para educarse. Ahora son profesionales y algunos de ellos todavía están en problema de conseguir trabajo de la sociedad.

And now my family has moved ahead, the race has advanced because of the family members that are here in the United States. They have helped the young people there to become educated. Now they are professionals and some of them still have the problem of getting a job in that society.

Eufemia presents two distinct paradigms. Her family in Guatemala has certainly advanced, however, only due to the benevolence of their relatives who reside in the United States.

Eufemia's hope diminishes when she exposes the fact that although her children and grandchildren are now educated, there is still no chance of advancement because of the racist practices of the Guatemalan society that continue to deny employment to black Guatemalans. Since Elisa has been able to find and maintain employment in the U.S. in a variety of low-wage fields, she is under the impression that the doors of opportunity are forever open to her as well as other racial and ethnic minorities, effortlessly hanging on welcomed hinges. This particular vantage point prohibits Elisa and Eufemia from further interrogating a system that has only allowed them to penetrate it at the lowest rungs.

African Presence in the Isthmus of Panama

Excerpt from "Negro nació" by Federico Escobar

También negro nací; no es culpa mía
El tinte de la piel no me desdora,
pues cuando el alma pura se conserva
el color de azabache no deshonra.
Hay en el mundo necios que blasonan
de nobles por lo blanco de su cara;

I was also born black; it is not my fault...
The tint of the skin does not tarnish me,
because when the pure soul is preserved
the jet black color does not dishonor.
There are in the world fools that boast
nobility because of the white of their faces;

que ignoran que en la tierra sólo existe
una sola nobleza: la del alma.

but ignore that on earth
only one nobility exists: that of the soul.

Although the 19th century poet, Federico Escobar, is hailed by some to be the most “unashamedly black of the Panamanian group” (Jackson, 1979, p. 64) and by others to be ‘plagued by his blackness’ (Watson, 2014, p. 26), Escobar “remains an important figure...because he is the first writer of African ancestry in Panama to acknowledge his blackness” (Watson, 2014, p. 20).

To understand how race has impacted the lives of African descendants in Panama, Guatemala, and the Dominican Republic, one must have an understanding of the history of afro-descendants in their respective countries of origin. In the Isthmus of Panama, although African descendants are believed to have lived in Darién before the arrival of the Spaniards, enslaved Africans were trafficked to Panama as early as 1511 or 1512, but definitely by 1513 according to official records. The majority of the Africans were trafficked by the Portuguese and the Hollanders and to a lesser extent the Genoese. “Sabemos que desde el siglo XVI están entrando constantemente negros en Panama para las necesidades del territorio y para la reexportación” *We know that since the 16th century the enslaved blacks are constantly entering Panama for the necessities of the territory and to be re-exported.* (Lowe de Goodin, 2012, p. 11). According to Lowe de Goodin, “Pero lo que sí se puede decir es que el istmo de Panama fue el primer lugar del continente a donde llevaron negros” *But what we can say is that the Isthmus of Panama was the first place on the continent where Blacks were brought [as slaves]* (Lowe de Goodin, 2012, p. 5). The enslaved Africans in Panama represented the vastness of the African continent. They were trafficked from Central Africa to western Africa (Fortune, 1994, p. 221-222). By the 18th century, a great percentage of the enslaved Africans brought to Panama were Congolese and Carabalis who respectively occupied 36.1% and 22.7% of the enslaved population registered from 1781-

1851 (Lowe de Goodin, 2012, p. 17). “La necesidad de mano de obra para explotar y generar riqueza de los recursos en el Nuevo Mundo dio inicio al gran negocio de la época.” *The necessity of a workforce in order to exploit and generate the wealth of the resources of the New World sparked the greatest business of the era.* (Lowe de Goodin, 2012, p. 5-6). The laborious tasks imposed upon the enslaved in Panama were manifold.

Laboraron en las minas de oro del Darién y Veraguas, en el buceo de perlas en el Golfo de San Miguel, en la construcción del Camino Real, edificios públicos, iglesias, monasterios y fortificaciones. También trabajaron en los aserraderos, trapiches, hatos, estancias y en diversos servicios domésticos. En los caminos transístmicos, los negros eran los cargadores de los tesoros y mercancías o bien los arrieros de los conjuntos de bestias de carga. Eran, asimismo, los conductores de los bongos o canoas en el río Chagres y su presencia fue indispensable para la explotación de todas las riquezas que ofrecía el Istmo. (Lowe de Goodin, 2012, p. 10)

They labored in the gold mines of Darién and Veraguas, in the deep sea diving for pearls in the Gulf of San Miguel, in the construction of the Camino Real, public buildings, churches, monasteries and fortifications. They also worked in sawmills, sugar mills, herding, ranches, and diverse domestic services. In the trans isthmus areas, the enslaved were carriers of treasures, merchandise and they worked as drivers of groups of animal herds. Additionally, they were navigators of boats and canoes in the Chagres river and their presence was indispensable for the exploitation of all the riches that the Isthmus offered.

It is apparent that the Panamanian economy was heavily dependent upon enslaved African labor from the 16th century through the 18th century. Throughout the African diaspora, the rise in slave trafficking also sparked a rise in slave uprisings. Be it Ganga Zumba’s mid-17th century slave revolt in Brazil, Toussaint L’Ouverture’s Haitian slave revolution in the 1790s, Nat Turner’s slave revolt in Virginia, USA in 1812, or the Cuban slave revolt by Carlota la negra (Carlota the Black woman) in 1843, wherever African descendants were enslaved, Africans revolted. Panama is no exception.

Undoubtedly, historians find Afro-Latin American voices during rebellions and revolutions...Africans with their descendants articulated their vision for the end of slavery based on the pressures of increasing labor demands, the limitations placed on

freed populations, and their contact with the circulating revolutionary ideas from Haiti. (O'Toole, 2013, p. 1103)

It is well documented by Fortune (1994) the extent to which the enslaved Africans protested their captivity in Panama. Some of the enslaved participated in hunger strikes only to have their lips burned and seared with hot carbon. Some opted for the ultimate liberation of suicide, while others fled captivity.

Fortune cataloga la reacción de rebeldía de los negros esclavos principalmente en dos formas: a) la del cimarronaje y b) la del apalencamiento. Los cimarrones eran rebeldes singulares y anónimos, de tipos transitorios; vivían en las selvas o los bosques. Los apalencados se rebelaban en grupo, adoptaban formas de la vida más permanente y preferían vivir en las montañas, donde formaban comunidades conocidas como palenques. (Fortune, 1994, p. 134-135)

Fortune categorizes the rebellious reactions of the enslaved blacks principally in two forms: a) that of the escaped slave and b) the escaped slaves of the mountains. The escaped slaves called *cimarrones* were lone dissenters and anonymous, and somewhat transitory; they lived in the jungles and forests. The escaped slaves of the mountains rebelled in groups, adopted a more permanent way of life and preferred to live in the mountains where they formed communities known as *palenques*.

These revolts were not without results. By 1533 the *cimarrones* and *apalencadores* had become so ungovernable that the Spanish crown was forced to make concessions. These concessions included “pedir el perdón de los negros Cimarrones y emitir decretos para prohibir los castigos extremadamente severos e inhumanos” (Diez Castillo, 1981, p. 19). *Apologizing to the escaped slaves and to enact decrees prohibiting punishment that was extremely severe and inhumane.*

Given the insurrections, among many other causes, by the middle of the 19th century the Panamanian institution of slavery began to weaken. Slavery in Panama was officially abolished January 1, 1852. Today, although blacks who are descendants of slaves in Panama are commonly referred to in literature as *Afro-Hispanics/Afro-Hispanos*, this term is rarely employed by native Panamanians, preferring the term *Panamanian* instead.

From Slavery to Castes in the Isthmus of Panama

Incorporating a race-based economic system in which whites are the superiors while blacks are subservient left a *caste system* in Panama both during the time of slavery and after its abolition, and arguably still today. According to the 1607 Panamanian Census, it is apparent that enslaved Africans, free or escaped blacks, as well as various mixtures of African descendants “superaron numéricamente a los blancos” *outnumbered whites* (Lowe de Goodin, 2012, p. 20). Given the fear of a black takeover of the isthmus, white Panamanians began to “utilizar una variedad de estrategias para lograr la gobernabilidad y convivencia en el Istmo de Panama” *utilize a variety of strategies to achieve the governability and coexistence in the Isthmus of Panama* (Lowe de Goodin, 2012, p. 20). To protect the economic and social interests of whites, a social order based on race was created. This social order quickly produced inequitable social classes.

...se desarrolló una sociedad de castas, con los mayores beneficios socioeconómicos a los blancos y los peores, a los negros. No obstante, persistía el temor por la superación numérica de los negros, lo que llevó a los gobernantes a crear una ciudad dividida donde los blancos residían en un área amurallada y el resto de la población negra, indígena, y mestiza residían afuera del muro conocido como “El Arrabal.” Por eso, hasta mediados del siglo XIX, la ciudad de Panama permaneció rodeada de la muralla y el foso, que separaban los intramuros de San Felipe y la gente de color del Arrabal de Santa Ana. Estos fueron las tempranas manifestaciones de discriminación racial con evidencias estructurales que se dieron en la ciudad de Panama. (Lowe de Goodin, 2012, p.20)

A society of castes was developed, with the greatest socioeconomic benefits going to the whites, and the worst to the blacks. However, fear of a black majority takeover persisted, which led the officials to create a divided city where whites resided in the enclosed area and the rest of the black population, indigenous, and mixed population resided outside of the wall known as El Arrabal. For this reason, until the middle of the 19th century, Panama City remained surrounded by a wall and trenches that separated the whites of San Felipe and the people of color from the Arrabal de Santa Ana. These were the early manifestations of the racial discrimination with structural evidence that occurred in Panama City.

Figuerola Navarro (1978) detailed the multiple ways that the racially charged walls of Arrabal still persist today, albeit more covertly. Whereas Lowe de Goodin (2012) focused on the

caste system of Panama, historian Arturo Fox (2007) explained the caste system in the broader context of Latin American colonialism. Disassembling the black/white binary, Fox's research clearly shows that all mixtures of people were disenfranchised in colonial Latin America, and still today. Those who could not claim Spanish descent or racial "purity" were denied privileges and access. Fox (2007) explained, "Era importante, sobre todo para los criollos, establecer su "limpieza de sangre", el hecho de que su procedencia española no había sido "contaminada" (p. 78). *It was important, above all for the criollos to establish their "cleansed blood," the fact that their Spanish lineage had not been contaminated.* A succeeding chapter expounds upon how *whiteness as property* has contributed to the marginalization of racial and ethnic minorities; hence the legacy of colonialism and colonization is still prevalent today.

Panama Canal Produces Shifting Racial Paradigms

Second to slavery, the building of the Panama railroad and the Panama Canal brought a noted source of African presence to the Isthmus. Following the abolition of slavery, thousands of West Indians of African descent migrated to Panama in search of adventure, opportunities, and a better life. "During this period, more than 45,000 Jamaicans came to the Isthmus of Panama, along with workers from Grenada, England, Ireland, France, Germany, Austria, India, and China" (Watson, 2014, p. 11). The next wave of international African presence would descend on the Isthmus by way of the French. During the decade of the 1880's, France's failed attempt to build the French Canal in Panama later precipitated the arrival of roughly 84,000 Jamaicans to the Isthmus. Following France's failure, the United States was eager to complete the project. The U.S. assisted Panama in gaining her independence from Gran Colombia, a feat that Panama greatly appreciated. As a result, Panama became a protectorate of the United States from 1904-1914. The U.S. venture to complete the Canal brought some "19,900 workers from Barbados and a small number of workers from Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Trinidad" (Watson, 2014, p. 11).

Another wave of black migration came in the 1880s-1900s. By then, privately owned and operated banana plantations were prevalent in the Isthmus, namely Snyder Brothers Banana Company and the United Fruit Company (Guerrón-Montero, 2006). “Thousands of Afro-Antilleans, originally from Barbados, Santa Lucia, Martinique, and Jamaica, migrated to Bocas del Toro at the beginning of the 1900s to work for banana plantations” (Guerrón-Montero, 2006, p. 210). Today, blacks who are descendants of West Indians commonly refer to themselves as *Afro-Antilleans or Afro-Antillanos*. Coupled with massive immigration from the West Indies, the U.S. presence during the construction of the Canal forever altered the racial structure of Panamanian society.

U.S. Intervention Breeds de facto Jim Crow

The U.S. intervention marked a period of further racial divide between ethnic groups in Panama, particularly between blacks and whites and later between Afro-Antillanos and Afro-Hispanos. In sum, the United States enacted the same system of segregation that had operated for centuries on U.S. soil. Firstly, the United States made a distinction based on national origin. U.S. American citizens were paid on a different wage system called the Gold Roll, whereas the non U.S. citizens were paid on the Silver Roll, receiving less pay. Other benefits such as spacious living quarters, furnishings, paid vacations, and sick time were only applicable to the Gold Roll. These unequal practices were not solely distinguished by national origin; however, they quickly morphed into racial distinctions as well.

Las distinciones de oro y plata también se aplicaban a facilidades públicas estableciendo en esa forma un sistema de discriminación racial y segregación que llegó a ser uno de los aspectos más deplorables de la vida en la Zona del Canal. Negros antillanos y blancos norteamericanos formaron distintas filas para recibir sus pagos, tenían distintas facilidades para el correo y los comisariatos. Las diferencias existían en las escuelas. Aunque el número de estudiantes negros matriculados fue el doble de los estudiantes blancos, se emplearon menos de la mitad de docentes negros en comparación con la cantidad de docentes blancos. (Lowe de Goodin, 2012, p. 56-57)

The distinctions of gold and silver also applied to facilities, which in essence established a form of racial discrimination and segregation that came to be one of the most deplorable aspects of life in the Canal Zone. Black Antilleans and white North Americans formed distinct lines to receive their pay; they had distinct facilities for mail and administrative offices. The differences also existed in schools. Although the number of black enrolled students was double that of whites, they employed less than half of the number of black teachers as compared with the amount of white teachers.

Buried History

I interviewed women from three different Panamanian generations. Jelly is 21, Jelly's mother Azucena is 45, and Iris, a friend of Azucena's is 60 years of age. All three Panamanian women are from Colón, Panama. Regardless of their generation, they offered similar accounts of Panamanian history as it related to the arrival of Afro-descendants to Panama. They were very knowledgeable about the arrival of West Indians to the Isthmus and how that heritage related to their ancestry. The participants were able to correlate the official historical accounts with their personal experiences. However, in some cases their presentation of history was limited. I attribute these limitations to no fault of their own. It was evident that similar to what occurs in U.S. schooling, the participants were fed the hidden curriculum in Panamanian schooling. The hidden curriculum is one that seeks to devalue or omit altogether minority contributions and voices from official school programming.

I asked the question: How did blacks initially come to Panama? To my surprise, all of my Panamanian participants cited the arrival of blacks to their shores with either the construction of the railroad in the 1850's or with the construction of the Panama Canal in the 1880's. It became apparent that although both Iris and Azucena were educated through college in Panama and Jelly through middle school, *none of my participants were aware that there had been African slavery on Panamanian soil*; notwithstanding the Panamanian slave trade pre-dated the 19th century railroad and Canal constructions by more than 300 years. In essence, the participants' knowledge

of black Panamanian history begins just after the 1852 abolition of slavery in Panama, with no collective memory beforehand.

Another common theme was that my Panamanian participants readily distinguished the wretched U.S. slave trade and that of other countries from their own “*non-slaveholding*” nation-state. It was even more noteworthy that each Panamanian participant was interviewed separately; therefore one was not influenced by the other. They each gave independent responses that bore a common thread: *unawareness*. According to Bryce-Laporte (1998),

Panama contrasts itself with other parts of Latin America having racial inequalities and injustices, which it claims do not exist in Panama...It attributes any inequalities and racism to the U.S. presence in Panama, which introduced segregation and discrimination in the Canal Zone. (as cited by Guerrón-Montero, 2006, p. 210)

In comparison to the system of slavery in the United States, Iris remarked,

Bueno, **la historia es totalmente diferente** [que los Estados Unidos]. Nosotros en Panama no tenemos sistema de esclavitud. **En Panama nunca hubo esclavos**. Acuérdate que pasaron, venían del sur, del sur de América. Subían, algunos paraban en Barranquilla en esa parte de Colombia, Cartagena y venían a Portobelo. Portobelo era el puente, porque Panama siempre ha sido un país de tránsito. **No eran esclavos de Panama, eran esclavos de otras partes**. En Panama no fue como en Brasil. Que en Brasil sí hubo esclavitud pero en Panama no. Esta figura nunca la tenemos en nuestra historia. **No existió en Panama. Cuando tú estudias la historia de Panama, nunca vas a ver esta figura de los esclavos**.

Well, **the history is totally different** (than the United States). We in Panama do not have a system of slavery. **In Panama there were never slaves**. Remember that they passed through; they came from the south, from South America. They ascended; some stopped in Barranquilla in that part of Colombia, Cartagena and came to Porto Belo. Porto Belo was a bridge, because Panama has always been a transitory country. **There were no slaves in Panama; there were slaves from other parts**. In Panama it was not like Brazil. In Brazil yes there was slavery, but in Panama no. **This feature never existed in our history. It did not exist in Panama; you are never going to see this figure of slaves**.

Iris felt that she was a descendent of slaves; however, she reported that she descended from those who had escaped from other parts of South America since, according to her; African slavery had

never been a Panamanian institution. As indicated above, Iris was adamant that Panama cannot be compared with other slaveholding nations. In the case of Iris, she was quite aware of slavery taking place in Brazil and in the United States as well as other South American countries like Colombia. It seemed that highlighting the cruelties of slavery in other parts of the world further served to distance Panama from such an ignoble history.

I posed the same question to Azucena. I asked her if there was a history of African slavery in Panama and I followed up by asking how did blacks first come to Panama. Azucena's response follows.

Well, what I know in my history it was basically because of the Panama Canal *they* [blacks] came to construct the railroad and the Panama Canal and *they* [railroad and Canal project managers] brought people from all over the place. I know they started with certain races and the Chinese was (sic) very intellectual in knowing about the technology and then the black was the strong ones. So they brought the black people just to do the hard work, to lift things because they always considered they were stronger than the other type of races because *they* [indigenous people] have this yellow fever and a lot of them died from that because they didn't predict that when they started excavating that they was (sic) gonna (sic) find that virus. And a lot of them died because of that and because of all the machinery they were using. So that's where I think a lot of the blacks came [from], from Jamaica, because my [maternal] grandmother was from Jamaica and she immigrated to Panama when she was 16.

Azucena responded to my question by referencing the 19th century construction of the Panama Canal. She was quite knowledgeable regarding the transport of different immigrant groups to complete the project as well as the surrounding circumstances, such as yellow fever, that triggered the vast migration of black Antilleans. However, like Iris, Azucena is convinced that the black presence in Panama is most likely traced to the Canal. You will also note that Azucena dates her references by mentioning her grandmother as one who came over from Jamaica to assist with the Canal, indicating a fairly recent history of black migration. I redirected Azucena back to my original question regarding the transatlantic slave trade. I specifically asked,

“Is there a slave history in Panama? How did the blacks who did not come to construct the Canal arrive in Panama?” Azucena’s response follows.

Well some of them came from Barbados, you know Belize, all these places where they have black people. You have Colombian, a lot of black Colombians, Costa Rican. Actually my sister’s dad was from Costa Rica. They were born in Costa Rica and I don’t know what their history is. But they were from Costa Rica from a place named Limón. Limón is the place in Costa Rica where predominantly you find blacks and they were from there.

In this quote, Azucena continues to place the history of blacks in Panama in a fairly modern context. Barbadians, like other West Indian groups, are known to have arrived as free (wo)men in Panama during the 19th century. Again, Azucena references recent history by citing the lineage of her sister’s father. She is still unable to locate Panamanian heritage in the context of 16th century Panamanian slavery.

I questioned how two out of three participants could have been educated through university in Panama, and yet have no knowledge of the legacy of slavery stamped in Panamanian history; notwithstanding a third participant who also was uncertain of Panama’s relationship with her enslaved past. I questioned who benefited by not exposing Panamanian students to this information? To gain clarity on this discrepancy, I solicited the assistance of Dr. Juan A. Rios Vega, a Panamanian scholar who served as the first bilingual guide and later as the Director of the Museo Afro-Antillano de Panama (Afro-Antillean Museum of Panama) in the late 1980s. Dr. Rios Vega is now an academician residing in North Carolina.

In response to the Panamanian participants’ unfamiliarity with their country’s entanglements in the African slave trade, he remarked the following.

Panama’s educational system has ignored the contributions of Afro-Panamanians for many years. Our textbooks do not explain when, why, and how blacks landed in the isthmus. This leads people to make assumptions and biased generalizations about Afro-Panamanians.

In support of Dr. Rios Vega's conclusion, famed Panamanian scholar, Melva Lowe de Goodin wrote,

El Ministerio de Educación (MEDUCA) tiene la obligación de proyectar en sus libros de textos los aportes de todas las etnias que conforman nuestro país. Si repasamos las páginas de los libros de textos utilizados en las instituciones de nuestro país, nos percatamos que hay muy pocas imágenes de la población negra. ¿Cuántos escritores hacen el esfuerzo de asegurar que la amplia gama de razas y etnias en el país son reflejadas en sus textos? Esta tarea no se va a realizar sino lo exigen las familias y asociaciones afropanameñas, además de la sociedad panameña en su conjunto. (Lowe de Goodin, 2012, p. 112-113)

The Ministry of Education (MEDUCA) has the obligation to project in their textbooks the contributions of all ethnicities that make up the country. If we review the pages of the textbooks that are used in the institutions of our country, we will notice that there are very few images of the black population. How many writers make the effort to ensure that the ample gamut of races and ethnicities of the country are reflected in their texts? This task will not be accomplished unless the families and Afro-Panamanian associations demand it, as well as the Panamanian society as a whole.

It appears that the same critique of the need for a comprehensive curricula that includes subjugated knowledge in order to better inform students is an issue in both Panama and in the United States.

Just as concerns of this nature often travel from country to country, so do individuals. Across the United States, Panamanians continue to cross U.S. borders. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Panamanian immigrants constituted 91,723, representing .03% of the population. By the 2010 U.S. Census the data had reached 165,454 immigrants, an increase over 10 years of 80.4%. Being that education is often the great equalizer in mediating obstacles of racial and economic advancement, two of the Panamanian participants came to the United States with an international teacher's program to work as educators in North Carolina's public schools.

Negotiations of Migration: From Panama to the United States

Both Iris and Azucena are trained educators. They have taught in a number of settings in their native Panama as well as in North Carolina. Their experience ranges from elementary,

middle, and high schools as well as teaching in professional programs. Both respondents have aspirations of one day teaching at the college level. Iris and Azucena came to the United States with the VIF International Education program, based in Chapel Hill, NC. According to the VIF website, to teach in this program, one must be from a country other than the United States. In addition to other requirements, s/he must have teaching experience in the country of origin and must speak English and the world language fluently. Once accepted into the VIF program, the applicant receives a contract for a minimum of two years, typically three years, to teach in a United States school. They are trained on culturally responsive teaching in a United States context, classroom management, and lesson preparation to name a few. According to the VIF website, the purpose of the program is to build “global education programs that prepare students for success in an interconnected world.”

Iris and Azucena were both selected as VIF teachers in 2004. Iris’ first teaching assignment was in a Guilford County high school while Azucena’s was in a Charlotte/Mecklenburg County high school. Both women first came to North Carolina alone and then later sent for their spouses and children respectively. I asked them what most surprised them upon immigrating to the United States. Azucena responded, “The most that surprised me was to see how people [in the USA] have so many, I would say things and opportunities and ... some of them just waste it.” Iris responded to the same question as follows. “Y yo crecí pensando que en los Estados Unidos no había personas pobres porque esa no es la imagen que se proyecta de los EE.UU. afuera.” *I was raised believing that in the United States there were no poor people because that is not the image that is projected of the United States abroad.* Iris also explained that she was amazed to learn that there were actually dirt roads in the United States, a characteristic that she only associated with developing countries. One of the most shocking moments for Iris was when she learned the term “ghetto” and its close association with poverty; a

phenomenon that she did not know existed in the United States. To this end, Azucena explained that in most developing nations one would never have access to as many educational, medical, and support aid as offered in the United States. She was disappointed that more U.S. citizens did not take advantage of the opportunities provided them.

Both Iris and Azucena seemed to be diligent teachers who took great pride in their positions. Often when I would meet with Iris to conduct her interviews she would be reading articles and books on culturally responsive pedagogy. Although she was urged by her administration to seek more professional development in this area, I believe she genuinely wanted to gain more insights on the topic due to teaching at a fairly diverse middle school.

Jelly followed her mother, Azucena, to the United States when she was 13 years old. She explained that while still residing in Panama, her mother *broke the news* to her and her younger brother that she had secured a position with VIF in the United States. Jelly recalled,

Well, I actually remember it like it was yesterday (Field note: Jelly laughs). We were all at McDonalds [in Panama] and my mom [said she] received the phone call today and oh yea by the way I was just offered a teaching job in the United States. And I'm like ohh ok, sounds like fun, so she came here first and then a year after in 2005 me, my brother and my dad came.

I also asked Jelly what surprised her most upon coming to the United States. Like the Guatemalans, the weather was her most abominable foe. Upon reflection, Jelly bellowed in laughter, “[What surprised me most was] the weather! The four seasons definitely. So it was in March and it was cold and I'm like Oh my God, Oh my God! ... As soon as I got off the airplane I'm like woe!” With time Jelly learned to adjust to the four seasons and she eventually settled in nicely to her new North Carolina home.

In the Latin American contour the Isthmus of Panama presents a complex migration narrative. While the vast majority of the African diaspora can be traced back to the transatlantic

slave trade, Panama detours. Although Panama's rich African heritage can also be traced to the 16th century slave trade, there were also subsequent waves of *voluntary* black migration to the Isthmus. The literature typically uses the term *voluntary* to distinguish the 16th century Africans who came to the Isthmus in chains versus the 19th century blacks of the West Indies who came as paid workers.

Voluntary is a term that should be unpacked given the circumstances under which the Afro-Antilleans came to reside in Panama. Due to the economic crisis of the Caribbean that disproportionately affected blacks, many Afro-Antilleans were left with few viable options other than migration. They were tapped as a sustainable labor force based on economic exploitation. According to Bourgois (1985), to avoid paying higher wages and building costly infrastructure, companies sought laborers willing to work "for subsistence wages under substandard conditions" (as quoted by Guerrón-Montero, 2006, p. 212). In addition to deplorable conditions and low wages, the migrants were often misled about the earnings and conditions in which they would be working. This exploitation was perpetuated by the French, the Spanish, and the United States. For this reason I question if *voluntary* is the best terminology given the shroud of circumstances and mendacities that attributed to the West Indians' migratory options.

The Panamanian participants represent two distinct lineages. Iris is an Afro-Hispana, descended from formerly enslaved Africans called cimarrones whereas Azucena and Jelly are Afro-Antillanas, descended from Jamaican Canal workers. Given their backgrounds, Iris' and Azucena's lives deviated on multiple fronts. Azucena is catholic, while Iris is protestant. Iris grew up in a Spanish language household while Azucena was raised predominantly with English and Jelly with both languages. Both Iris and Azucena wed Afro-Antillean men while Jelly's marriage to an African-American partner elucidates the cultural *mélange* prevalent in immigration narratives. And yet, with so many distinctions, all three women landed here in North Carolina.

Their first-hand narratives and lived experiences provide us the opportunity to sojourn with them from the unifying waters of the Panama Canal to the beautiful landscape of the Carolinas.

Maintaining a Connection to Home and to their African Roots

After immigrating to the United States, participants found various ways to remain connected not only to their home countries, but also to their African past. They stayed connected to their homelands through occasional visits, but mainly through social media such as Facebook and a litany of similar programs including Skype, Line, Tango, Wuzup and online newspapers and broadcasts from their native lands. None of the participants felt isolated from their relatives in terms of communication. It was clear that 21st century technology greatly facilitated communication between the participants and their relatives abroad. Along with staying connected to family members, participants also found it essential to remain connected to cultural artifacts and products such as language, food preparation, and musical selections from their homeland, many of which were African influenced. These cultural elements were proudly demonstrated during our interviews and field observations.

In terms of meeting locales, I asked the participants to choose the location of the interviews. Both the Guatemalans and the Panamanians chose to rendezvous in their homes while the Dominicans and I alternated between their home and the hair salon. The meeting locations were an added bonus because not only did allowing the participants to select the language and location offer them some control and partnership in the research process, it also afforded me the opportunity to observe them in their most comfortable settings.

I was able to observe how the Dominicans, Guatemalans, and the Panamanians decorated their homes: each home bore representations of their national origin with prominent cultural items displayed such as their flags. Some of their homes also incorporated afro-centric themes such as black artwork, black religious figures, and even African artifacts such as the distinct pestle and

mortar used by many cultures for grinding. Coupled with modern day conveniences, they also proudly displayed African origin kitchen ware. The Guatemalans and the Dominicans still use a mortar and pestle to grind corn, rice, vegetables, and other food products. The Guatemalans explained that they also miss the taste of well water to which they were accustomed in their Livingston village. To compensate they use a clay pitcher and clay cup for water which simulates the flavor of well water. I happen to collect antique items; therefore, I was enthralled to see the ladies using ancient pottery and cookware. Elisa and Eufemia proudly explained that they had purchased the mortar and pestle from a Haitian shop in Florida while on vacation. Eufemia was eager to teach me the words for the items in both Spanish and Garífuna. The mortar and pestle are referred to as a *mortero* in Guatemalan Spanish and *hana* in Garífuna. The clay pots are called *cántaros* in Guatemalan Spanish and *dinas* in Garífuna. Interestingly, when I used the term *mortero* with the Dominicans they did not recognize it. For them the *mortero* would be called *pilón*.



Figure 4. Cultural Artifacts. (l) Elisa displays clay drinking pot & demonstrates pestle & mortar (*mortero*) in her home. (r) Dominicans María & Julia's display pestle and mortar (*pilón*) in their home.

All participants were eager to show me around their homes and to point out their cultural artifacts. In most cases, I was able to not only observe their living spaces, but actually *experience* slices of their culture with them.

To this end, when I arrived at Iris' home for our first interview, she had prepared a special Afro-Panamanian meal for me. Since the meal was unannounced, I had just eaten on the way to her home, but not wanting to be discourteous, I accepted the offer to join her and her husband for lunch. With each bite, Iris and/or her husband explained the Jamaican or African roots of the foods and their preparation such as *el coco* (coconut dishes). During their interview, the Garífuna respondents also mentioned *coco (with fish)* as a staple dish. Panamanians Azucena and Jelly also explained their nostalgic relationship with African/Jamaican dishes. The Panamanian participants mentioned dishes such as *chicheme* which is somewhat similar to oatmeal, *tostones* (fried green plantains), and Jamaican *rundown* which Azucena described as being similar to paella. Being the foodie that I am, I too began craving these dishes upon hearing the delicious descriptions which were conveyed with such intimacy. Comparable to southern hospitality, although Iris and her husband had never met my husband, they were eager for him to experience the Jamaican-Panamanian traditions as well; therefore, they packed him a lunch to go which he thoroughly enjoyed. The meeting seemed more like a family fellowship and less like an arranged interview. I found that our conversation was more relaxed and less formal over the noonday meal.



Figure 5. *Panamanian Meal*. Panamanian meal served at Iris' home.

When I interviewed the Dominicans in their home, unexpectedly María and Julia had also prepared a Dominican meal for me. María enjoyed showing me around her pantry while pointing out the foods that had survived from her African ancestors such as *ñame* or Dominican yams. *Ñame* was also mentioned by the Guatemalan and Panamanian participants as a staple dish among the African descendants of their respective countries. As with Iris, our almuerzo (lunch) was a golden opportunity to speak more intimately about topics both related to the study and those unrelated. For example, after I shared over lunch that my cousin had recently purchased an apartment in the Dominican Republic in the town of Puerto Plata, María and I discussed matters such as Dominican real estate, gentrification, development, and property ownership. She also shared Christmas traditions typical of her small Dominican town as well as her upcoming trip to the Dominican. María amiably invited me to visit the Dominican Republic with her anytime that I wished to do so.



Figure 6. *Dominican Meal*. María and Julia preparing meal of beef & vegetables, rice, and *ñame*.

Although they did not prepare a meal, the Guatemalans offered a festive environment. Elisa and Eufemia dressed in traditional attire for our home interview and they had classic Garífuna music playing when I arrived. Before beginning the interview, the women danced their native dances and invited me to join them. Since musical rhythms flow effortlessly through my veins, my happy feet could not pass up the opportunity to *cut a rug* with my Garífuna sisters. They introduced me to dances and music such as *marimba*, *punta*, and *paranda*. They educated

me on Garífuna musical artists such as Hondurans Aurelio Martinez and Israel Guity and Guatemalan Gadu Nuñez, as well as Garífuna gospel artist Isanigu. The women demonstrated how their music was derived from Africa by playing the works of Congolese artist, the Kanda Bongo Man, which was almost identical in sound to the Garífuna rhythms. We shared an afternoon that was mixed with rich dialogue and rich musical expressions.

In reflection, these interview settings and observations were priceless experiences that I would have missed had I arranged the interview locales in traditional settings such as my office or even in a neutral location like a coffee shop. Another vibrant expression of African influences and culture was demonstrated by the merger of spirituality and music.

Azucena informed me that the month of November was her parish's celebration of black history month. She shared that since there are many black saints celebrated in November, such as St. Josephine Bakhita of the Sudan and St. Martín de Porres of Perú, her parish would be holding a concert to honor their contributions. She explained that the concert would entail black gospel songs infused with blues and jazz rhythms; she also added that native African attire was highly encouraged during the month's celebrations. As a lover of gospel music I eagerly accepted Azucena's invitation to attend the concert in order to conduct a field observation. The hour and a half drive was barely sufficient to contain my excitement. Upon entering the parish, I observed about 500 guests. The parish's membership was predominantly black although the priest was white. Several attendees wore native attire and the church was decorated with African fabrics such as kente cloth. The church's spirit, ambience, and programming reminded me of a good ole fashioned black church. Following the concert, in conversations with members I learned that many of them had in fact come from protestant black churches and did not consider themselves *cradle Catholics*, to use their terminology, but rather Catholic converts.

The choir rocked with all the steps, beats, and rhythms of a traditional gospel choir. Both the emcee and the choir directress relied heavily on *call and response*. They would *call* a chant, inspirational words, or sing a lead-in to a song to which the entire audience was expected to roar back in collective *response*. As a child I grew up reciting many of the same calls and responses. Most of the songs performed were familiar and very special to me such as the Negro spiritual *Ride on King Jesus*. This song has long been used to bring hope to people in despair. I had attended other Catholic services before. As an undergraduate assignment, I had even lodged in a Catholic monastery for several days to better absorb the writings that we were studying of 17th century Mexican nun and self-taught scholar Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Sor Juana is regarded as Latin America's first feminist in that she demanded education and equal treatment for women and even spoke out against the sexual abuse inflicted by men both in and outside of the church. I also resided in Mexico every summer for 5 years, giving me great exposure to the Catholic Church. However, I had never attended a black parish. This was unlike any Catholic service that I had ever experienced, even as a protestant Christian, I felt right at home.

I learned that African influences such as food, artifacts, language, and music had not only survived in the participants' native countries, but had also traveled with them as they crossed the borders into the United States. The fact that the participants had not abandoned their traditions, but had carried them into their host country and had chosen to share them with the researcher reveals their significance.



Figure 7. *Catholic Parish*. (l-r) Welcoming banner located at entrance of parish. Sign-in table draped with African kente cloth. Poster of Sudanese St. Josephine Bakhita.



Figure 8. *Gospel Choir*.

Negotiations of Immigration and Class: “I did it for my family.”

Excerpt by Cristina Rodríguez-Cabral, Afro-Uruguayan Poet

Cimarrones

...y son negros los que veo
qué alegría vernos tantos...
Esto es lo que dignifica nuestra lucha
ir por el mundo y seguirnos viendo,
en Universidades y Favelas
en Subterráneos y Rascacielos,
entre giros y mutaciones
barriendo mierda
pariendo versos.

Hemos roto las fronteras impuestas
Mis hermanos indios
Mis gemelos negros,
Somos la gran mayoría en pie

Escaped Slave

...and all I see are blacks
How joyful to see so many of us...
This is what dignifies our struggle
to go throughout the world and to continue seeing us,
in Universities and Shacks
in Subways and Skyscrapers,
between turns and changes
sweeping shit
birthing verses.

We have broken through the imposed barriers
My Indian brothers
My black twins,
We are the great majority on foot

The Rodríguez-Cabral poem that introduces this chapter on social and economic class vividly expresses the widespread reach of African descendants. The poet identifies the myriad spaces, from skyscrapers to shacks, that *los negros* inhabit as well as the barriers that they have surpassed to achieve upward mobility. She links the struggles of African descendants to other oppressed groups such as Native Americans, showing that *injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere*. The last stanza ends with a burst of revolutionary movement that catapults *el negro* above his oppressors. Like the narrative voice of Rodríguez-Cabral's poem, my participants have also transcended many racial, social, and economic barriers. As a result, today they are visible in innumerable social and class locations. I was struck that in most of the narratives, as the participants ascended, they were not individualistic. Their dedication to their families captured what Guatemalan Nobel Laureate Rigoberta Menchú described as the concept of *cooperativismo*, which is the notion of collective responsibility. Cooperativismo embodies the South African precept of *Ubuntu*, loosely meaning *I am because you are*. Some participants were new arrivals and others had been in the U.S. for over 30 years. No matter their tenure, most participants took an active role in supporting their relatives abroad.

Each participant described her social class status in her respective country of origin. She then spoke about her level of mobility now that she resides in the United States as well as the impact that immigration has had on her family abroad. First, the Dominican participants María and Julia described their social class in the Dominican quite matter-of-factly: "Vengo de una familia muy pobre y quise probar suerte." *I come from a very poor family and I wanted to try my luck*. When María mentioned *trying her luck*, she was referencing her decision to board the life-threatening *yola* (small boat) in route to Puerto Rico in an attempt to reach the United States. If there existed even a miniscule measure of hope to have a better life and to assist her family, the

risk was worth it. María and Julia provided anecdotes to illuminate their lived experiences related to social class. Julia explained,

En mi país, que, si tú tienes dinero, vives bien. Así que también si tú quieres hacer cualquier cosa, tienes que pagar. Para todo tienes que pagar. Y si quieres ir a un restaurante, tienes que ganar muy bien para ir a un restaurante allá. Aquí, comemos todos.

In my country if you have money, you live well. Also if you want to do anything, you must pay. Everything has a fee. And if you want to go to a restaurant, you have to earn very good money to go to a restaurant there. Here [in the United States] everyone eats.

María and Julia not only felt like they did not have the necessities of life in Santo Domingo, but they also were denied social benefits like dining out. María expressed the only way to a better life was through immigration. She remarked, “Viví una vida de humillación, y aguanté, soporté todo por un peso por ayudar a mi familia.” *I lived a life of humiliation and I took it, I put up with it to earn a dollar to be able to help my family.* In concert with Black Transnational Feminist tenets of focusing on the family and the entire community, several times during our interviews María mentioned an unquenchable desire to make life better for her family abroad and for those who immigrate to the U.S. She explained the following.

Y allí [en Miami] trabajaba en una factoría, trabajé en un restaurante limpiando platos, me pagaron dos pesos la hora. Y siempre sacaba dinero para mandar a mi familia. Siempre ayudé a mi familia. Mi mamá, que era muy pobre, en Santo Domingo vivía.

And there (in Miami) I worked in a factory, I worked in a restaurant washing dishes, they paid me two dollars an hour. I always set aside money to send to my family. I always helped my family. My mom, who was very poor, lived in Santo Domingo.

Julia echoed her niece's responses and agreed that the family would never have reached new heights were it not for María's sacrifices. Julia felt it was important for me to know that María's munificence has never stopped: she continues to assist her family today. Although María and

Julia readily recognized how class had affected their family, they found it challenging to convey how race and class intersect in the Dominican.

When I asked María and Julia if there was a link between poverty and race in the Dominican, they were hesitant to draw a definitive correlation. Although they proclaimed there was an undeniable link with respect to Haitian immigrants who were by and large black and also occupy the lowest rungs of society; they seemed ambivalent with respect to Dominican nationals. When asked if whites were more prosperous in the Dominican, Julia explained,

En realidad no, porque allá hay moreno también que tiene más que el blanco. Pero, sí te digo de que los blancos por ejemplo dondequiera que llega, no sé por qué, mucho más allá por sea, aunque no tenga dinero es blanco, tú entiendes.

In reality no, because over there, there are blacks also who have more than whites. But, yes I will admit that whites, for example, wherever you go they seem to go further for some reason, even though they don't have money they are white, you understand.

Julia found it difficult to correlate the causes of white mobility, hence she noted, “no sé por qué” (I don't know why). Julia had observed that even when one controlled for economic class & financial standing, whites still seemed to be more successful than their black Dominican counterparts. I am sure that this field of questions was difficult for Julia given that she is a very brown Dominican who is considered *morena* by Dominican standards and has personally been prey to the Dominican racial order. Although her aunt María is a very fair skinned Dominican who would be considered *white* in the Dominican Republic, both Julia and María suffered the same degree of poverty and lived similar lives in Santo Domingo. Still yet it was evident to Julia that there is *something*, albeit difficult to name, that perpetuates white privilege in the Dominican. Julia's narrative reminded me of an experience that my mother often found difficult to put into words.

My mother worked in the hospital for many years as a Certified Nurse's Assistant II (CNA). She was very proud of her job and was constantly recognized for her superior work ethic. My mother had many friends with whom she had grown up who also worked at the hospital; however, most of them worked in housekeeping. My mother would often remark, 'I can't figure it out, but although there are white women who start out in housekeeping, they rarely ever stay there. They always end up working on the floors as CNAs, receptionists or in some other capacity. For all of her efforts, you rarely see a black woman transfer out of housekeeping.' My mother's narrative, along with Julia's, converges with Peggy McIntosh's (1990) seminal work on white privilege.

As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage. I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege. So I have begun in an untutored way to ask what it is like to have white privilege. I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks. (McIntosh, 1990, p. 31)

Given the realities of white privilege, non-whites employ a multitude of strategies to mitigate whiteness. In the case of María, acquiring a trade was necessary to penetrate society's invisible knapsack.

Both María and Julia completed high school in Santo Domingo but were not afforded the opportunity to go beyond secondary school. While living in Florida María attended cosmetology school and received her cosmetology license, thereafter she began working in Dominican hair salons for the next several years. Later, one of her friends from Florida relocated to North Carolina to open her own salon. The friend beckoned María to join her, María accepted. After working in her friend's salon for a few years, María yearned to open her own salon. She thought,

“si ella puede yo también puedo. Aunque yo tenía muchos años ya de experiencia en eso, yo nunca digo que no puedo.” *if she can, so can I. Although I had many years of experience working in the field, I never say I can’t do something.* “Y después me puse a orar... y dije un día yo podré tener mi salón, mi propio.” *And afterward I began to pray and I said one day I will have my salon, my own salon.* Today, María owns a contemporary salon where she has two additional stylists working for her and two more cousins who she has supported who are soon to start. With unshakable pride, María declared, “Yo soy muy lanzada y positiva y dije yo me voy a tirar y llevo un año y pico y tengo mi salón y la verdad me ha ido super bien.” *I am very daring and positive and I said I’m going to go for it and I’ve been at it for over a year and I have my salon and the truth is that it has gone super well.*

I spent several hours at the salon observing. During my time there it was bustling with eager clients who all left satisfied with their services. On a Saturday, you can hardly enter the establishment for the long line of patrons waiting to be served. During the observations, several of the salon’s patrons lauded María and her stylists’ professionalism and high quality work. After being privy to the fullness of María’s immigration story along with Julia’s I was overjoyed by her success and counted it an honor to share her narrative with the readers of my dissertation. María did not find solace in victimization, but rather with the support of her community she leapt over many obstacles to supersede national, cultural, racial, sexist, and socioeconomic barriers.

Unlike María and Julia who had come from a low earning family, Blanca described her social class in the Dominican as “clase económica, nosotros somos medio. Quiere decir que no es rico rico pero acomodado.” *We are from an economic class, we are middle class. It means that we are not rich, rich, but we are comfortable.* Blanca felt fully supported by her parents in Santo Domingo and she did not immigrate to the United States due to economic necessity. Although Blanca entered the United States as a documented immigrant, her lack of English language

proficiency forced her into low wage, low skilled occupations. Blanca explained that although she completed high school in Santo Domingo, she did not have the opportunity to attend college in the United States. “No fui a la escuela porque siempre estaba trabajando, trabajando, trabajando, trabajando. Limpiaba casas, aquí pintaba apartamentos, de todo, trabajaba en factoría...” *I didn't go to school because I was always working, working, working, working. I cleaned houses, here I painted apartments, a little bit of everything. I worked in factories...*

She later learned English through interactions with her English speaking children and she also picked up English while on the job. Following, Blanca attended cosmetology school and became a licensed hair stylist. Blanca offered a comparison of her social class in Santo Domingo to that of the United States.

Allá en Santo Domingo yo vivía bien porque uno tiene su casa propia y allá no hay tanto problema como aquí, sabes, que tú compras y pagas, y pagas y pagas. Pero, pienso que también uno tiene una vida cómoda aquí. La vida puede ser más fácil aquí. No importa la edad que yo tengo, yo sigo trabajando. Y aquí me ha dado más oportunidades de progresar.

There in Santo Domingo I lived well because one has his own house and there are not as many problems as here you know, where one buys and then pays and pays and pays. But I think you can also live a comfortable life here too. Life can be easier here. It doesn't matter what age I am, I continue to work. And here I have been given more opportunities to progress.

Although Blanca feels that life can be quite accommodating in the Dominican, she reveals that she has had greater opportunities here in the United States. More than once Blanca expressed that she would likely not have had the opportunity to work in the Dominican given that she is nearing 50 years old. Although Blanca mentioned ageism, she never mentioned any racial discrimination as it relates to social status in the Dominican. To the contrary, the Guatemalan participants reiterated race and class disparities that are prevalent in their homeland. When asked to describe her social class in Livingston, Guatemala, Eufemia answered as follows.

En Guatemala la clase que tenemos nosotras dos es una clase no media... Éramos luchadoras allá, nosotros no vivíamos holgadamente. Allí estábamos entre la gente que son como nosotros. No la primera o la segunda, entre la tercera y cuarta clase.

In Guatemala the class that we have is not middle class... We were fighters there, we didn't live comfortably. There we lived amongst people who were like us. We were not first or second class, we lived between the third and fourth class.

On a scale of one to four, with one being the most privileged, the Guatemalans described their class as falling between the last two categories, the most underprivileged. Elisa and Eufemia explained that although they were not starving, they enjoyed little of life's tangible pleasures and even necessities such as a descent education. Nevertheless, the women worked hard and were able to survive. Eufemia explained that many of the older Garífunas continued in the traditions of their ancestors although they were not able to earn an adequate living. "Antes la ocupación de ellos era ir a sembrar, ellos eran agricultores, sembraban yuca, plátano y todas raíces sembraban ellos como caña, y cosechaban, de eso vivían ellos. Y también pescaban." *Before, their occupation was farming, they were farmers, they planted yucca, plantains, and all types of roots like sugar cane, and they harvested, and they lived off of this. And they also fished.* Many of the occupations mentioned by Eufemia are now of the past. Gonzalez (1979) explained,

By 1956, migration was already a necessity. In 1975, when I returned to Livingston...I found that few people any longer engaged in fishing and farming. Not only did the young people disdain the work, they really had little knowledge of how to go about the important activities. (p. 261)

Eufemia, too, expressed disappointment that the younger generation of Garífunas seemed to be distancing themselves from their roots, namely the Garífuna language. In any event, the working conditions in Elisa and Eufemia's Garífuna community were not sustaining their family. Unlike Julia, who recognized a race and class disparity but could not clearly articulate it, Elisa was eager to provide the rationale for why the black Guatemalans (Garífunas) were disadvantaged. I asked

if they could explain the perception of white and native Guatemalans towards the Garífuna people and also how race impacted class outcomes. Elisa explained,

Sinceramente cuando yo viví en mi país no encontraba ninguna percepción de ellos hacia nosotros los Garífunas, por lo consiguiente, yo me sentía mal porque siempre ellos estaban en su ... (Field note: pausa larga, reflexión profunda.) Nos sentíamos distanciados, aislados, por el trato de ellos hacia nosotros. Ejemplo, en educación cuando la persona Garífuna o la gente de raza africana allá se gradúa de una profesión, no se le da oportunidad para trabajar. Le puedo dar ejemplo, si usted va a la capital de Guatemala, usted va a entrar al aeropuerto de Guatemala. Usted no va a ver ninguna gente de color trabajando en el aeropuerto.

Sincerely, when I lived in my country I didn't find any perception of them (non Garífunas) towards us the Garífunas, because of the following. I felt bad because they were always... (Field note: long pause, deep reflection). We felt distant, isolated, because of the way they treated us. For example, in education when a Garífuna person or a person of African descent there graduates with a profession, they are not given the opportunity to work. I can give you an example, if you go to the capital of Guatemala; you are going to enter the airport of Guatemala. You will not find any person of African descent working in the airport.

Both Azucena and Iris expressed similar experiences with regard to unequal access to employment in Panama. One difference is that Iris felt the inequitable access was a phenomenon of the past while Azucena felt it was very much alive today. Azucena remarked,

In Panama you find racists too [like in the U.S.]. Like when you have to go and get a job certain places they always looking for the white, blonde. Or you know they hire people more from the city where they can find these, what you call native [typical Hispanic] looking, you know girls that maybe they would dye their hair to look white.

In contrast to the race and class discrimination experienced in Guatemala, the Guatemalan participants relayed that they had faced no discrimination of employment since they came to the United States and as a result they have been able to maintain a modest living. With Eufemia being elderly and disabled she has not yet found work; therefore, Elisa is the sole wage earner. Elisa earns a little more than \$8/hour, but she is able to sustain her family. They reside in a comfortable two bedroom apartment that is furnished with all the modern conveniences including

a flat screen television, computer, CD player, DVD player etc. From my observations, I would say that Elisa and Eufemia live modestly from day to day.

Elisa, Eufemia and I attend the same church. Our church has a food bank and a clothing bank. Whenever Elisa's income is limited, typically due to assisting relatives abroad or relatives in the United States, she utilizes the church's help center to carry them over. Elisa feels passionate about volunteering at the church outreach center whenever she can in order to give back. Even with occasional lack, Elisa and her mother explained that they have a much better living condition in the United States than in Livingston, Guatemala and most importantly they are able to assist their family members abroad with financial support.

Education is often the means by which citizens ameliorate their living conditions and move from one social class to another. For this reason, one of the key goals of Eufemia and Elisa is to help to educate their relatives in Livingston. Eufemia is from Livingston where schools historically completed in 6th grade. According to my participants, only about 10 years ago did Livingston receive the resources to extend schooling through high school. There is still no college or university in Livingston. Elisa is from Puerto Barrios, a slightly larger city than Livingston. Puerto Barrios expanded their offerings about 40 years ago, shifting from 6th grade completion to high school. Unfortunately, Eufemia only attended school through the 3rd grade and Elisa through the 6th grade. Both women complained that Livingston and Puerto Barrios, although Livingston to a greater degree, were drastically under resourced.

Notwithstanding, Eufemia also criticized the Garífuna people for not always taking advantage of the resources afforded them, albeit limited. Eufemia explained that the government as well as various humanitarian agencies sent resources to Livingston such as sewing machines so that the people could make clothes and then profit from their sales. They also sent instruments and drums so that the young people could form music groups and earn money from tourists.

Eufemia was disheartened that with these resources allocated, she felt few took advantage of them. Eufemia rebuked,

Bueno, no sé si este es un hábito entre nuestra cultura Garífuna, porque han tratado de mejorarnos pero nosotros no estamos abiertos para esta causa. Los primeros días los muchachos bien entusiasmados, a los pocos días ya no llegaban [a practicar los tambores]. Las máquinas [de coser] llegaban, la ayuda llegó, pero la gente se desanimaron (sic).

Well, I don't know if this is a trait of our Garífuna culture, because they have tried to better us but we are not open to the cause. At first the young people were enthused, but in just a few days they stopped attending [drumming sessions]. The [sewing] machines came, the help came, but the people became discouraged.

Unlike some of the Garífuna that Eufemia rebuked, she and Elisa were eager to tap into available resources and to better their Garífuna communities in Guatemala even while residing in the United States. To this end, Elisa asked me if I knew of any resources that might assist her in reaching her goals. On one of our scheduled field observations, I transported Elisa and her mother to a local International Resource Center where my friend worked as the director. While speaking with the director of the resource center, Eufemia made a correlation between race and class. She stated, “La mayoría de la gente de donde yo vengo es el color de nosotros y no hablan inglés.” *The majority of the people who are from where I am from are the same color as us (black people) and they do not speak English.* They cited about 90% Garífuna and 10% ladino. The participants went on to explain that most of the people in Livingston, Guatemala speak Garífuna although some also speak Spanish, *but hardly anyone speaks English.* In order to learn English you must go to the capital, la Ciudad de Guatemala (Guatemala City), which is far away and very expensive. Even though learning English is the fastest way to gain employment and to have upward mobility, Livingston is quite impoverished; therefore, the residents cannot afford to go to the capital to learn English. Upon hearing the women mention how race and class impact social mobility in Livingston and Puerto Barrios, and reading how various Garífuna researchers’

(Gonzales, Helms, Kerns, Marshall, Owens, Taylor) findings support this claim, I was heartened to observe how Eufemia and Elisa had attempted to *salir adelante* (move forward) by renegotiating their class status in the United States through education, employment, and naturalization.

Following our visit to the resource center, it was impressive that Eufemia and Elisa promptly walked through the doors that had been opened to them. Elisa enrolled in GED courses at the local community college and began taking classes just a few weeks after the initial meeting with the director. Eufemia received several resources (films, CDs etc.) that would assist her as she prepared for the naturalization exam. I held a subsequent meeting with the local *Industries for the Blind* to inquire about remunerative employment opportunities for Eufemia. Two of my former students were in management at the Industry and they were able to expedite Eufemia's paperwork. At the time of this dissertation, Eufemia was waiting to be called in for training. Although she would likely start out making minimum wage, her earnings coupled with her daughter's would surely provide a nice cushion and extend the family budget. Although Elisa and Eufemia would now be categorized as working class, considering Eufemia's disability, it is impressive that since their arrival in the United States some 30 and 14 years ago respectively, they have managed to negotiate a stable environment. Shortly after immigrating to the United States Elisa proudly obtained her U.S. citizenship while Eufemia obtained legal residency. Both women are dedicated to continuing to build a better life here in the U.S. South while also pledging to assist their Garífuna relatives abroad financially.

I observed a deep yearning in the hearts of my participants to assist their families. Like the Dominicans, the Guatemalans also felt it was their responsibility and took great pride in remitting funds to their Garífuna relatives. They also viewed their imbursements as a counter response to the racially discriminatory practices of the Guatemalan government and their

inequitable distribution of resources. I asked Eufemia and Elisa if they had any plans to one day return to their native country to live. Eufemia responded with nostalgia, “Tengo que acatar las órdenes de los que pueden atenderme. Pero de mi parte, yo quisiera irme para mi casa.” *I have to submit to the orders of those who can care for me. But for me, I want to return to my home.*

Elisa’s response was less sentimental. She stated the following.

Yo definitivamente vivir aquí. Sí cambiaran las leyes en mi país hacía la gente Garífuna, la discriminación con respecto al trabajo, yo regresaría. Pero no he visto nada después de 20 años de haber salido de allá, he regresado y lo ha sido lo mismo.

I will definitely live here. If they were to change the laws in my country towards the Garífuna people, *the discrimination with respect to employment*, I would return. But I have not seen anything in the 20 years since I left there, I have returned and it has remained the same.

I posed the same field of questions to my Panamanian participants. I first asked them to describe their social class in their country of origin. Iris considered herself to be a middle class professional in Panama. She explained that she had a college degree, worked as a teacher, and often traveled to the United States on vacation. I inquired further and asked her to describe the social class in which she was reared. Iris explained that her parents’ generation and even her older siblings did not have the opportunity to study in university. They lived during a time when children often left school around the 6th grade to work. This description parallels Elisa’s story whose schooling also ended in Guatemala in the 6th grade. Iris explained that although she is the only one of her 10 siblings to receive a college education, nowadays most of her cousins and peers have university degrees. Iris also shared that she did not grow up with her father, causing other male relatives to assist her mother and to provide a fatherly model for her. Of her 10 siblings, I asked Iris why she was the only child to attend college. As the most obedient and the most studious child of her siblings, Iris found special favor with her mother.

Mi mamá siempre me decía, tú tienes que estudiar para que vivas mejor que yo, para que tengas las cosas que yo no tuve. Entonces ella nos inculcó, especialmente a mí, que tenía que graduarme, que tenía que estudiar, tenía que seguir estudiando.

My mother always told me, you must study so that you can live better than I, so that you can have the things that I did not have. Therefore she always inculcated in us, especially in me, that I had to study, I had to continue my studies.

Iris certainly met her mother's expectations. By contrast, Azucena categorized her social class while growing up in Panama as medium (middle class). Azucena shared the following.

You know in Panama they have, you know in underdeveloped countries they have the high or the low class...in terms of what I have studied I could say like the medium because I'm not rich. So I would not consider myself high class.

Azucena described a young life of frequent travels to the United States on vacation, a luxury of which few Panamanians could boast. Her mother had an African-American friend. Although the friend resided in New York she had relatives that lived in Azucena's neighborhood in Panama. Her mother and friend became more like sisters and each year the mother would visit her in the United States and bring along certain children with her for cultural exposure. Azucena also shared that her father was a mixed raced man from Mississippi; however, given his strained relationship with her mother, Azucena never met him. Unlike Iris, Azucena is not the only sibling to have received a college education. Her sister is a doctor who studied medicine in Mexico City. Of the three groups represented, it stood out that the Panamanians were the only participants who did not feel obligated to assist their families abroad financially. Although Azucena often sends her mother gifts for holidays, her family is economically stable and is not suffering from financial hardships. I asked Azucena and Iris to detail some of the economic differences that they have observed between the United States and Panama. Both participants concurred with the Guatemalan and Dominican respondents, citing the United States as the land of opportunity.

United States: As the Land of Opportunity

According to Iris, “No importa de qué etnia eres, tienes la oportunidad que no tienes en los países de donde vienen. Aquí hay oportunidad. Para mí, EE.UU. es un país de oportunidades, si sabemos aprovecharlas.” *It doesn’t matter what ethnicity you are, you have opportunities that you would not have in the countries where [immigrants] come from. Here, there are opportunities. For me, the United States is a country of opportunities if you know how to take advantage of them.* Azucena responded similarly.

I think that there are a lot of opportunities and that was one thing that I’ve seen with students. **They don’t take advantage.** I was so impacted to see that students get books text (sic). Some of them even get their lunch. In Panama you don’t get that. You have to buy every single text, every level that you go. And here they get so many things free and I feel so bad to see that the kids would bring the bag that the parents pack and throw it in the trash. The kids just waste food like that. I think about the kids in Africa that need that and they just waste it and **they don’t take advantage of all the resources that the country gives them.**

Both Iris and Azucena were grateful to be in a country of abundance. They not only mentioned educational opportunities but they also mentioned the U.S. healthcare system. They felt the U.S. medical care was far more superior and accessible than that of Panama. Both women agreed that U.S. citizens do not take full advantage of these resources. María also explained that most Dominicans view the United States as the *land of opportunity*.

En la República Dominicana, que todo el mundo quiere venir. (Field note: Ellas se ríen) Todo el mundo quisiera venir a este lugar, y encontrar gente de aquí que se vayan a casar. Lo ven muy bien. Por cierto ellos ven una entrada y salida para salir y para venir aquí para superarse. Perfecto lo ven.

In the Dominican Republic, everyone wants to come here. (Field note: They burst out laughing) Everyone wants to come to this place and find someone here that they can marry. They view the U.S. very well. Certainly they see a way in and a way out in order to leave and to come here to make a better life. They view the U.S. perfectly well.

María and Julia's quote above indicates that their primary perception of the United States is neither reduced to its racial heterogeneity nor its homogeneity, but rather as a haven for social and economic progress.

As with other participants, I asked the Dominicans and the Panamanians if they had plans to return to their respective countries. Unlike Elisa, all other participants longed to return *home* one day. To my query the Dominicans responded almost in unison without floundering, there was no doubt that they would one day return home. For the good and the bad, most of what they loved was still in Santo Domingo. Julia and María planned to work in the United States a few more years, save money, and then return to their native land. In fact, María had already purchased land on which to build a home in the Dominican.

Of the Panamanians, Jelly longed to return to Panama to live amongst her friends and family. She admitted that it would be complicated given that her husband is African-American and has roots in the United States; to complicate matters further he does not speak Spanish. She plans to continue her studies to become either a practicing medical doctor or to receive a PhD in a related field. Jelly hopes that she will earn enough money to comfortably live in both the United States and Panama. Due to the opportunities in the United States, Azucena was in the process of receiving permanent residency status to be able to remain here. She explained that because she likes to travel, like Jelly, ideally she would float between both countries; however, Azucena's Panamanian husband prefers life in the United States and for that reason they are seeking permanent residency. Iris and her husband held similar ambivalence. After working in the United States and saving money for a few more years, Iris longs to return to Panama; however, her husband is content remaining in the United States. Iris gave a sentimental response when asked why she wished to return to her native Panama.

Porque allá están todas mis raíces. Mi familia, yo no tengo familia en el área aquí. Mis amigos de toda la vida están allá, aquí tengo buenos amigos también y extraño mucho el mar. Mi ciudad hace costa, así que yo nunca fui al mar aquí en Carolina, yo no sé ni dónde queda.

Because all of my roots are there. My family, I don't have family in the area here. My lifetime friends are there, here I have good friends too, and I miss the sea very much. My city [in Panama] is at the coast and here in Carolina I have never been to the beach, I don't even know where it is.

Iris' response encompassed many of the aspects of *home* that most immigrants who are separated from their homeland would contemplate. In the novel, *Geographies of Home* by Afro-Dominican author, Loida Maritza Pérez (1999), the maternal character, Aurelia, who has resided in the United States for many years becomes nostalgic for her native Dominican Republic. Pérez (1999) wrote,

More and more Aurelia found herself remembering the distant past. She might be in the middle of a conversation or in church listening to a sermon when she would suddenly recall an event, words spoken, even a scent, a flavor, a texture—each evoked as if she were experiencing it at the moment. It wasn't that she romanticized the past or believed that things had been better long ago. She had been poor even in the Dominican Republic, but something had flourished from within which had enabled her to greet each day rather than cringe from it in dread. (p. 23)

Each of my participants visibly struggled with the incongruence of emotions that accompanied my query when asked if they ever planned to return *home*. Many immigrants wrestle with the dichotomy of loving their homeland while simultaneously being forced to confront the economic and/or political deprivation that necessitates their departures. Although the participants had traveled innumerable miles to reach the United States, it was obvious that they had never truly left that place called *home*.

Negotiations of Social Class: Construction of Socio-Economic Class in Latin America

Along with race and gender, this study also interrogates how negotiations of class have impacted the lives of my participants. In the United States, we often fail to extrapolate social class

from economic class, hence the terminology *socioeconomics*. However, within a Latin American context, it is imperative that scholars distinguish the two. Latin American scholar, Arturo A. Fox (2011) offered an insightful analysis of this distinction. Similar to the United States' construction of class, Fox (2011) explained that class in Latin America is also indelibly linked to race. For example, "Negros e indígenas pertenecen casi invariablemente a las clases bajas" (p. 146). *Blacks and the indigenous occupy almost invariably the lower classes*. While mixed or mestizo populations occupy the middle classes, "la clase alta...por lo general, está dominada por la población blanca" (p. 146). *"The upper class, in general, is dominated by the white population."* Similarly, in Gates' (2011) study of *blackness* in multiple Latin American countries he found,

[T]he people with the darkest skin, the kinkiest hair, and the thickest lips tend to be overrepresented among the poorest members of society. Poverty in each of these countries...all too often has been socially constructed around degrees of obvious African ancestry. (p. 11)

Apart from race, Fox (2011) also identified a myriad of factors that influence social and economic class standing in Latin America.

Fox (2011) explained that in many Latin American countries social class can be totally disparate from economic class. It is not uncommon to meet someone who does not earn an adequate living wage, economically speaking; however, who has ascended well socially and reached a high degree of respectability. This level of attainment can result from race, education, investments, certain professions, family name, and religious affiliation to Catholicism (although it is not necessary to be a practicing catholic) to mention a few.

Una persona que viene de buena familia es normalmente un individuo al que se le identifica con un apellido que ha ganado el respeto de la comunidad durante varias generaciones y al que se asocia con ocupaciones típicas de la pequeña burguesía: hombres de negocios, profesionales, comerciantes, empleados públicos, educadores, etcétera. Hay pensionados, por ejemplo, que apenas reciben el dinero suficiente para sobrevivir pero logran mantener su posición social como miembros de la clase media

debido a su apellido y al círculo de relaciones que han heredado de sus padres. (Fox, 2011, p. 147)

A person who is from a good family is normally an individual who is identified by his last name, who has earned the respect of the community over various generations, and who is associated with typical petty bourgeois occupations such as business men, professionals, merchants, public employees, educators, etc. There are pensioners, for example, that hardly receive sufficient money to survive but they manage to maintain their social position with members of the middle class due to their family name and to the circle of friends that they have inherited from their parents.

Fox (2011) affirmed that the most important factors related to social class in a Latin American context are “la mentalidad, el vocabulario y los valores de la clase media ..., no importa las diferencias raciales, nacionales o económicas que los separen” *the mentality, the vocabulary and the values of the middle class..., the racial, national, or economic differences that separate them do not matter* (p. 147). A Dominican colleague who now resides in Canada echoed Fox’s analysis. She highlighted that although she was of an upper economic class in the Dominican Republic; her class actually declined in Canada in terms of socioeconomics.

When I look at and confer with my lifestyle over there [in the Dominican] I had maids. I had someone to drive me everywhere. And my name itself opened the doors to anything I wanted in my city. **I just had to say that this is my name, I am the daughter of so and so.** Over here I am totally anonymous which I love in a sense. (personal communication, March 27, 2013)

The previous quote reveals that my colleague is not solely referring to economic privileges based on property or income, but her economic stability intersects with her social standing. She is privileged economically, as evidenced by the fact that her family could afford to contract maids and drivers, and she is also privileged socially based on her prominent family name. Her description highlights Fox’s conclusion that social status in Latin America moves beyond economic standing.

Construction of Social and Economic Class in the United States

The aforementioned class description differs in some regards to the United States' construction, although it is quite possible to occupy diverging social vs. economic categories in the United States as well. For example, here in the U.S., one might be esteemed and receive social privileges based on her/his family name or occupation, such as a clergy(wo)man or first responder, while simultaneously earning a modest salary. However, in the United States, the class category is most often relegated to property holdings, investments, and income earnings.

In Marxist theory a defining feature of a social class is that its members bear a shared relationship to the means of production—land, industrial capital, and financial capital. Weber (1947) argued that social class was based on the ownership of property but not just ownership or production and the means of production. (Craib, 2002, p. 343)

Similar to Latin America and other parts of the world, in the United States race, class, and gender oppressions are constantly intersecting. “Trying to rank dimensions of oppression reifies them; instead, social analysts must recognize how structures like race, class, and gender create, shape, influence, and depend on each other” (Ken, 2007, p. 11). Given the United States' historical relationship with the black-white binary and the designation of *whiteness* as property, social class often falls along racial and gender lines meaning that still today people of color and women earn less income and have fewer property rights than whites.

Early historical accounts in the United States reveal systematic stratifications that led to many of the social and economic disparities prevalent today.

Given how capitalism works, it connects to white racism in ways that are both direct and indirect. In the history of the United States, the direct connection is most apparent in the enslavement of millions of Africans as a source of cheap labor on cotton and tobacco plantations in the [U.S.] South. This was done for purely economic reasons...planters chose to minimize labor costs by exploiting slave labor rather than pay free workers a living wage. To justify such direct forms of imperialism and oppression, *whites developed the idea of whiteness to define a privileged social category elevated above everyone who wasn't included in it.* This made it possible to reconcile conquest,

treachery, slavery, and genocide with the nation's newly professed ideals of democracy, freedom, and human dignity. (Johnson, 2006, p. 45-47)

Johnson's (2006) synopsis vividly expressed how historical context matters and extends to present-day disparities. Not only in the United States, but also in Latin America my participants reported being disproportionately affected by legacies of economic injustice.

Like their African-American counterparts, most of my participants' ancestry can be traced to slavery or servitude of some kind. Given centuries of unpaid, forced, or dramatically undercompensated labor, half of the participants expressed varying levels of economic depravity over generations. Some participants managed to equalize social and class disparities through education or immigration, but others shared stories of paucity that could be traced, at least in part, to a history of whiteness as property.

Cheryl Harris's (1993) seminal work published in the Harvard Law Review gives a comprehensive analysis of the correlation between whiteness and property. Harris (1993) goes beyond the black/white binary to demonstrate how whiteness as property disenfranchises anyone who cannot claim white property rights. Similar to how poet Rodríguez-Cabral linked the subjugation of blacks and Indians in her poem *Cimarrones*, Cheryl Harris (1993) also compared the marginalization of the two groups.

Although the systems of oppression of blacks and Native Americans differed in form—the former involving the seizure and appropriation of labor, the latter entailing the seizure and appropriation of land---undergirding both was a racialized conception of property implemented by force and ratified by law. (Harris, C., 1993, p. 1715)

The legalized support of racial inequity is a primary tenet of Critical Race Theory. Harris (1993) explained the privileges of protection and domination that are attributed to “whiteness and white identity” whereas “their absence meant being the object of property” (p. 1721). According to Harris (1993), “In particular, whiteness and property share a common premise---a conceptual

nucleus---of a right to exclude” (p. 1714). Today, quantitative researchers have also documented how these early attempts to preserve whiteness and white maleness as property have had a lasting economic impact on social and economic class disparities.

After accounting for any relative differences between their samples, such as education etc., Frank et al., (2010) found that “Latin@s with darker skin earn, on average, \$2,500 less per year than their lighter-skinned counterparts” (p. 393). According to Logan (2010), “Compared to other Hispanic groups, black Hispanics’ neighborhoods have the lowest median income, the highest share of poor residents, and the lowest share of homeowners” (p. 479). After controlling for other variables, “it appears that the relative nature of racial phenotype is important,” indicating that Latin@ immigrants are not all treated equally in their host country (Frank et al., 2010, p. 393). These Afro-Latin@ statistics correlate to economic disparities found amongst African-Americans as well.

Both of the Guatemalans, Elisa and Eufemia, and two of the Dominicans, María and Julia, described their upbringing as poor to very poor. Panamanian respondent, Iris, described her upbringing as working class. Next, Panamanians Azucena and Jelly described a middle class background. Likewise, Dominican respondent Blanca described her upbringing as middle class. Blanca expressed no experiences of poverty, racism, or sexism in the Dominican and consequently she was also the only participant who could easily pass for white. Black feminist, E. Frances White (1995) cautioned feminist scholars against the propensity to assume that “all white women are middle class and all black women are working class.” White (1995) critiqued, “Missing in such accounts is the position of middle-class black women and working-class white women” (520-521). Azucena’s class narrative reveals the diversity of class positionality endemic of Afro-Latina women’s lives. The participants’ profiles demonstrate that although all of them acknowledge African heritage and are also linked by their Latina ethnicity, there is no absolute

uniformity to their social and economic class locations. In sum, Lorde (1995) noted, “Unacknowledged class differences rob women of each other’s energy and creative insight” (p. 285).

Responses to Inter/Intragroup Racial Politics

In alignment with my primary research question, I compared the participants’ racialized experiences in their country of origin to those in the United States. The research revealed that respondents were consistently making negotiations of the ever complex nuances of inter/intragroup racial politics. Participants confronted and/or addressed many dynamics related to this topic. Occupying liminal spaces exacerbated the complexity of group politics. Some of the liminal spaces in which my participants were positioned included those who shared a nationality or ethnicity with others, but still felt like foreigners amongst *their own*, or perhaps those who shared the same race (black, white), but yet found little in common with their compatriot. Given the *in-between states* that my participants often occupy, this chapter illuminates the complex negotiations that they made to address them.

First, I asked Elisa and Eufemia to compare racial experiences both in Guatemala and also in the United States. Elisa’s ensuing narrative reveals that non-black Guatemalans do not accept the Garífuna as their fellow compatriots.

Hay un rechazo. Sí hay un rechazo para nosotros. Dirán qué negativa soy, pero he observado mucho. No soy muy anciana pero tampoco soy muy joven. Entonces, nos quieren poner como un quinto, sexto nivel y siempre nos tienen un apodo. Nos dicen que regresemos a África. *Go back to Africa*. Así nos dicen.

There is rejection. Yes, there is rejection of us. They will say, oh how negative I am, but I have observed a lot. I am not old but I’m not young either. So they [whites] want to put us in the fifth or sixth level [meaning in a very low class] and they always have some sort of nickname for us. They tell us to go back to Africa. That’s what they say to us.

Eufemia, who is elderly, recounted a story of a courteous white ladino who politely called her *tía* (*aunt*) out of respect for her age. Another ladino overheard the white Guatemalan using the term of endearment and rudely questioned it.

Eufemia explicó, <<Un blanquito me dijo tía con respeto y le dijo un blanco...>>
¿Porque le dice tía si usted es blanco y ella es negra?
Entonces le dije yo, <<¿Usted dice que no me diga tía>>?
Él respondió, <<¡Sí! Ustedes son de África>>.
Eufemia respondió, <<Sí, ¿por qué? ¿Adán y Eva dónde nacieron? No nacieron aquí en Livingston, nacieron en África allá en el Edén. Todos nosotros venimos de un par de personas. Yo no sé porque ustedes tienen distinción. Somos hijos de Adán y Eva, son los primeros padres de nosotros y solo son dos>>.
Entonces se rieron del muchacho. Porque él no le da que decir.

Eufemia explained, “A young white man called me *aunt* out of respect and another white boy said...”
“Why do you call her aunt when you are white and she is black?”
So I said to him, “You are saying that he should not call me aunt?”
He responded, “Yes! You are from Africa.”
Eufemia responded, “Yes, Why? And where were Adam and Eve from? They were not born here in Livingston, they were born there in the garden of Eden. We all come from one couple. I don’t know why you all make distinctions. We are all children of Adam and Eve, they are our first mother and father, and there were only two of them.”
Then everyone laughed at the boy because he had nothing further to say.

From the quotes above, it is evident that both Elisa and Eufemia have suffered discriminatory experiences in their native land. Interestingly, Eufemia combats the racist derisions by citing her spiritual belief in *oneness*. She challenges racism by reminding the white Guatemalans that all humankind descended from one people. Eufemia inquires further as to why it is necessary to have division between races given their shared origins.

As a result of being treated as *other* in their native country both Guatemalan participants explained that blacks of their community prefer to identify based on their Garífuna heritage as opposed to their national identity. Elisa and Eufemia are most proud to call themselves *Garífuna* instead of Guatemalan. This decision is influenced by cultural pride as well as an act of resistance

to their marginal status. “Ethnicity apparently overrides nationality, since they claim to feel less close to non-Garífuna from the same country than they do to Garífuna from other than their homeland” (Gonzalez, 1979, p. 259).

Although Elisa did relay accounts of prejudice and denial of African heritage within the Latino immigrant community of the U.S., specifically from Mexicans, she did not offer any anecdotes regarding discrimination by U.S. Americans or within the workplace. Elisa was content that she had never experienced racism from U.S. Americans in the 30 years that she has resided in the country.

Given Elisa’s social strata, according to Critical Race Theory, it is highly unlikely that she would reside in the United States for over 30 years and never experience racism or discrimination. CRT holds a number of basic tenets. “One is that racism is normal, not aberrant, in [U.S.] American society. Because racism is an ingrained feature of our landscape, it looks ordinary and natural to persons in the culture” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, p. xvi). Proceeding, I will theorize that racism in the United States may be invisible to Elisa for a number of reasons including, but not limited to, 1) social and linguistic isolation from U.S. Anglo speakers, 2) unconscious adherence to a colorblind ideology, 3) the U.S. vs Guatemala binary, 4) and seeing the U.S. as an uninterrogated messiah.

Elisa falls into several target groups, she is a dark brown-skinned woman of Latin American descent, she is an immigrant (although naturalized), and she is not yet fluent in English although quite conversant. Elisa’s English is spoken with a heavy accent. Her Spanish is absolutely fluent, but it is also influenced by her Garífuna tongue. Additionally, Elisa is a low wage worker. For several years she has worked in a factory that produces cookies. What could account for Elisa’s perceptions of an anti-racist United States?

Although Elisa is fairly conversant in English, she is quite withdrawn and hesitant to speak in English with native speakers. Elisa suffers from internalized inferiority particularly as it relates to her English. I have also observed vacillation on the part of Elisa to speak Spanish with people that she deems as “*finá*” or upperclass. For the most part, Elisa is more comfortable speaking in Spanish than in English. Although Elisa works with Anglos and Spanish speakers, due to her vacillation with the English language she has more social interactions with Latin@s both at work and outside of work. When scholar José Itzigsohn (2004) researched Dominican immigrants’ perceptions of racism he too concluded that language barriers can shield you from recognizing discrimination.

When our interviewees think of discrimination they think not about structural features of the social order but daily encounters with people from other groups...Hence it is not surprising that those that are more involved in and come more into contact with [U.S.] American society report more individual cases of discrimination. *Those that are less incorporated and less in contact with the mainstream are in a sense shielded from these daily discriminatory encounters, although they certainly experience daily the structural consequences of a racialized social structure.* (p. 58)

While Elisa vividly names Latinos’ dismissal of Afro-descendants, nevertheless, she relayed no experiences of discrimination encountered from either U.S. blacks or whites. I surmised that since Elisa can communicate and interact more fluently using her native Spanish tongue, these interactions may cause her to be more exposed to discriminatory acts and to more readily recognize such behaviors within the Latino community. Elisa’s lack of contact with English speakers may have sheltered her from individual racism. When Elisa was asked if she had experienced racism in the United States, she responded as follows.

Generalmente no, pero individualmente sí. Eso no puedo culpar a todas las personas. Por ejemplo, la persona mexicana, la gente de color de la persona mexicana nos desprecian a nosotros de color de Centroamérica yo lo he notado. Como no se llevan bien con nosotros, la gente de color mexicana con la gente de color de Guatemala. Yo lo he tenido por experiencia. Um, por ejemplo hubo una persona que se refirió que en México no

habían—antes de yo conocer que habían muchos mexicanos—me dijeron que no había gente de color en México. Un mexicano me dijo eso. Entonces me resultó que yo encontré un grupo de mexicanos de la parte de Veracruz [con muchas personas de color], entonces cuando yo los conocí, le pregunté, entonces pero sí me respondieron bien, pero no me aceptaron también como persona de color como ellos. Yo me di cuenta, entonces yo lo dejé en su lugar y lo respeté. Con los negros y blancos [de los Estados Unidos] no he tenido la misma experiencia. Me llevo bien con ellos y ellos se llevan bien conmigo.

Generally no, put individually yes. I cannot blame everyone for this. For example, Mexican people, Mexican people of color put down people of color from Central America, I've noticed. I have experienced it. For example there was someone that said that in Mexico there were not—before I knew there were a lot of Mexicans—they told me there were no people of color in Mexico. A Mexican told me that. So it resulted that I found a group of Mexicans from the part of Veracruz [with many people of color], so when I met them, I asked him, although he responded to me well, they did not accept me also as a person of color like them. I realized this, so I left him in his place and I respected him. With blacks and whites [from the United States] I have not had the same experience. I get along well with them and they get along well with me.

Elisa's statement is loaded with intragroup politics. Towards the end of the quote, Elisa affirmed that she has experienced no acts of discrimination from black and white U.S. Americans; however, she gives a fairly detailed criticism of a racialized experience within the Latino community. In her experience, she found that Mexicans denied the existence of Afro-descendants in Mexico. Upon meeting Afro-Mexicans, they too were not accepting of Afro-descendants from Central America and even discounted them. Rodríguez and Menjívar (2009) confirmed, "While [the Garífuna's] Spanish fluency helps to bridge inter-Latino distances, the Garífuna always face potential negative experiences with other Latinos because of their black racial identity" (p. 191). Whereas Elisa equated their actions to denial, Azucena explained that Mexicans seemed oblivious to their own African ancestry and as a result exoticized all things African. Azucena explained,

I was in Potosí and my sister studied in D.F. and predominantly I see mostly white [Mexicans]. My shock when I went to Mexico is that we have people looking at us from the windows. Isn't that something? And my sister says when she got there they came and touched her and they wanna (sic) touch her hair, and she was like... (Field note: Azucena gives a look of disgust). And it was really bad and I didn't even know they had so many black people in Mexico because they do so many soap operas and only now they started putting black people in there.

Also commonly reported in the United States amongst African-Americans, Azucena and her sister were viewed as an anomaly in Mexico. It seemed that many Mexicans had not encountered black people before. Although Azucena was aware that there were an abundance of Afro-Mexicans, she also indicted the media for only showing one image of Mexicans and omitting the faces of Mexico's African descendants. While Azucena was critical of her international experience in Mexico, throughout her interviews Elisa was always complimentary of her host country: The United States.

Like other participants, Elisa often expressed extreme appreciation for the opportunities afforded her in the United States. When weighing the heaviness of racist practices of ladino Guatemalans toward the Garífuna people the United States reigns triumphantly as egalitarian. Elisa succinctly remarked, "Me siento feliz de haber venido a los Estados Unidos. *God bless America.*" *I feel happy to have come to the United States. God bless America.*

Bonilla-Silva (2004) explained the structure of colorblind ideology. "He contends that the main frames of this ideology are the denial of the centrality of discrimination, the abstract extension of liberal principles to racial matters, the naturalization of racial matters, and the cultural explanation of minorities' standing" (as quoted by Bonilla-Silva, 2003, p. 560). "To have salience and currency, ideologies must produce narratives that explain the world in ways that make sense to people" (Bonilla-Silva, 2004, p. 560). Although Bonilla-Silva's colorblind hypothesis is a theoretical model most often associated with whiteness, he also acknowledges the following.

Colorblind racism would not be a dominant racial ideology if it had not affected at some level even those who oppose it. For an ideology to become dominant whether based on class, gender, or race, it must have some salience for those on all rungs of the social ladder; it must muddle in some fashion the ideological waters of the dominated and constrain their resistance. (Bonilla-Silva, 2004, p. 574)

In the case of Elisa, I would not categorize her observances as a denial of racism and discrimination. To the contrary I believe a fairer description might be that she is simply not as socially conscious in a U.S. context given certain limitations. In analyzing racial constructs in the Dominican Republic, scholar Silvio Torres-Saillant (2000) explained that in many Latin American countries, Latin@s are taught to fully recognize overt demonstrations of racism (such as those expressed by Elisa of Latin@s) while not being as cognizant of more subtle, covert, colorblind, or even passive aggressive forms of racism.

Oppressive segregation and isolation, discriminatory practices, and racism in Guatemala towards the Garífuna precipitated what Gonzalez (1979) called *forced migration*. Upon reaching U.S. borders, Elisa and Eufemia have fought to achieve here what they could not achieve in Guatemala. Although Elisa remains a working class woman, she has continued her education, maintained employment, and acquired U.S. citizenship. Elisa and Eufemia's perseverance has not only shaped their lives, but also opened financial and educational doors for their relatives abroad. However, due to Guatemala's continuously closed doors of employment to the Garífuna people, Elisa and Eufemia shared that they both longed to one day return to Guatemala to start a program in their village that will teach English. They feel English language acquisition might open doors for their relatives to work in tourism and enable them to earn a living wage. Elisa and Eufemia's success is only as valuable as that of their village. Like the Dominican participants, Elisa and Eufemia were committed to the South African concept of *Ubuntu: I am because you are*. As long as one Garífuna remains a second class citizen, Elisa and Eufemia are forever incomplete. Having made such substantial gains in the United States and by extension having assisted their relatives abroad, I am not certain that the Garífuna respondents were able to analyze U.S. race relations without the obvious backdrop of their negative Guatemalan experiences. To the

contrary, the Panamanian respondents varied in their perceptions and criticisms of Panamanian and United States racial practices.

Iris, Azucena, and Jelly offered differing accounts of race relations in their native Panama. For the most part they all agreed that Panama was more racially harmonious than the United States. Jelly explained that she had never experienced nor seen any form of racism exhibited in Panama. Although Iris acknowledged that there was racism in Panama, she viewed it as a past phenomenon that is no longer problematic in contemporary Panamanian society. Azucena may have presented the most balanced view in that she was able to give examples of institutionalized racism as well as individualized. The modern-day relevance of racism in Panama is where Azucena and Iris' narratives diverged. When asked if there was racism in Panama, Iris offered a comparison to the United States. Iris contended.

[En Los Estados Unidos] creo que [racismo] es histórico por lo que ha ocurrido en el pasado con la esclavitud y yo creo y mi percepción es que sea institucionalizado. Es por ley y básicamente es gubernamental, es por el gobierno que ha existido. Por ejemplo cierta cantidad de raza, por ejemplo cosa que no existe en mi país. **En países hispanos eso no existe. El racismo no existe en este sentido.** (¿Pero entre personas sí existe? Preguntó Krishauna). El pudiera ser, yo creo que sí. Entre personas pero no es generalizado, en ciertas regiones, no en todo el país. Ciertas regiones pudiéramos decir como familias o individuos que tienen sus preferencias porque todo el mundo tiene sus preferencias pero no es como aquí que es tan marcado.

[In the United States] I believe it [racism] is historical because of what has happened in the past here with slavery and I believe, my perception is that it is institutionalized. It is by law, it is governmental, it is because of the law that it has existed. For example, a certain number of races, something that does not exist in my country. **In Hispanic countries this does not exist. Racism does not exist in this sense.** (Krishauna interjects, "But does it exist between individuals?") It could be, I believe so. Between people but it is not generalized, in certain regions, not in all of the country. In certain regions we could say like in families or individuals that have their preferences because everyone has their preferences, but it is not so marked like it is here.

Iris explained that due to the U.S. history of African slavery, racism is more institutionalized and pronounced here. Unfortunately, her assumption is based on the erroneous premise that Panama never had slavery. Iris also alludes to affirmative action or racial quotas where a certain number of races may be earmarked for certain positions. Interestingly she equates affirmative action with racism, legislation which was meant to combat institutionalized racism. Finally, Iris does not feel that there is institutionalized racism in Panama and when prompted by my follow-up question she only acknowledges individualized racism as a probability, and not as an absolute. As a result of Iris' response, I asked Azucena if she felt there was racism in Panama and if she thought it was a past phenomenon or a present-day concern. Azucena responded that racist practices flourished in Panama both in the past and also currently.

Well it could be both because when you graduated ... in certain places if you go to get a job if they're very *white related* (meaning having a preference for white employees) they will not hire you. In Zona Libre de Colón, this happens. There are a lot of very rich and renowned companies and a lot of them have mixed people but then certain people will pick certain kind of race for the jobs. Like if you gonna (sic) be a salesperson, it's very rare that they put a black person except that black person have to be like very [exceptional].

Next, I inquired of the Panamanian participants regarding their perceptions of racial groups of the United States.

Panamanians' Perceptions of Racial and Ethnic Minorities

The participants' lived experiences and personal exchanges greatly influenced their opinions of blacks and Latin@s, be they positive or negative. As evidenced by my participants, Latin@s' perceptions of race are influenced by their interactions with the racial and ethnic groups that they encounter in the United States. The research of McClain et al. (2006) on Latin@ residents of Durham, NC suggests that Latin@s migrate to the United States with preconceived notions of racial hierarchies brought from their home countries. Many stereotypical images are

perpetuated by the media. In an indictment of Spanish language television, Michael A. Fletcher (2000), a Washington Post journalist, noted that these broadcasts put out an “almost exclusively Caucasian face” (As quoted by Torres-Saillant, 2005, p. 300). Torres-Saillant (2005) contended that Afro-Latin@’s struggle “to land a job on Hispanic TV”...with the “exception being made of course for the entertainment fields of boxing, baseball, some pop music forms, and other manifestations” (p. 300). Afro-Panameña, Azucena, concurred, “Predominantly you find like the Latina white. They look white, you know, because on TV they always wanna (sic) show this.” Latin@ immigrants do not enter the United States ignorant of the type casted representations of racial minorities prevalent in their home countries, representations that are further exacerbated in the United States. Of Panama, Lowe de Goodin (2012) explained,

Los medios de comunicación social y las agencias publicitarias también juegan un papel crucial en la transformación de las actitudes de la población. En muchas ocasiones los periódicos, vallas publicitarias, y pantallas televisivas proyectan imágenes estereotipadas negativas de individuos o grupos afrodescendientes. (p. 116)

The social media and publicity agencies also play a crucial role in the transformation of the attitudes of the population. On many occasions the newspapers, billboards, and the big screen project negative stereotypical images of Afro-descendent individuals and groups.

An example of negative stereotyping, and more specifically the criminalization of Afro-Panamanians, follows.



Figure 9. Panamanian Billboard of Crime Prevention. Translation of Panamanian Billboard: Prevent crime. Call the police of San Felipe at the following telephone numbers...

Azucena is from Colon, a region of Panama that has a large black population. She reported that some white Panamanians reject those who are from Colón and assign racial stereotypes to them “because they feel Colón is where you find all of the thieves or the people that talk bad...with like a dialect.” Azucena negotiated these negative portrayals by carrying herself more professionally and by refining her speech patterns. As was the case in Colón, homogeneity can be dangerous in which Latin@s may not view U.S. Americans as individuals and instead may group them homogenously. Although confronted with similar stereotypes and labeling in their native countries, some participants were able to judge U.S. subgroups as individuals while others tended to make broad generalizations of certain groups.

As VIF teachers, both Azucena and Iris received extensive training on the cultural nuances of schooling, teaching, and learning as it related to reaching different cultural groups. Both participants expressed positive views of various racial groups who attended their respective churches. It appeared that if they knew the people well on a personal level, they were objective and more welcoming, but I found that Iris and Azucena made broad generalizations of certain races as a whole. During our conversations it was evident that both educators came to view and

judge certain ethnic communities based on their work experiences and encounters. Even though they had positive interactions with most cultural groups in other settings such as church, their views of these communities were forever clouded by their school context. I found Azucena's 21-year old daughter, Jelly, to be less judgmental of minority groups and less apt to make broad-based generalizations.

When assessing the socio-economic condition of blacks and Latin@s, both Azucena and Iris held less than favorable views. In particular they each disparaged blacks and Latin@s for not excelling more given *all the opportunities before them*. They accused blacks of lacking motivation as a result of constantly living in the past. They accused Latin@s of participating in gang activity whereupon they perpetuate negative stereotypes of Latin@s. They also mentioned the low levels of education found amongst Mexican immigrants. Azucena stated the following of African-Americans.

When I see black people behaving and acting so wildish and so loud, I say you can have fun, but... And then you have the white people looking like (Field note: Azucena gives a sigh of revulsion), aww they have to be black (Field note: Azucena claps hands together in disappointment). They (sic) not gonna (sic) say it but I feel you don't have to show I'm black because I can act tough because in the past I was a slave. And that's the only thing that I feel is something that I don't like because **it make (sic) you feel bad that you are black**, maybe not because you are born here but you are in the culture. So as they see you they think oh she's a black woman. Oh, there comes this black woman. *You have to show them [whites] that because of this color you are gonna be better and not worse.*

Not only did Azucena express disappointment in African-American's "wildish" behavior but she also expressed that their behavior made her feel bad to be a black person and to be associated with African-Americans who behaved in this manner. Based on observations of her middle school students and their parents, Iris analyzed the condition of low wage earning African-American and Mexican families who live in what Iris termed *the ghetto*.

[L]as personas que vienen de estas áreas son agresivas y tienen una cultura de violencia: La forma como hablan, se manejan, la forma de vestir versus otros niños que son de padres profesionales que tienen familias bien formadas, no disfuncionales como los que vienen de, como dicen mis alumnos, de los ghettos. Sí, estas personas que vienen de estos lugares y allí, algunos parientes incluyen hispanos, mexicanos incluye porque ellos viven en esos barrios, vienen con el mismo comportamiento.

The people that come from these areas are aggressive and have a culture of violence: The way that they speak, carry themselves, the way they dress versus other kids that are from professional parents that are well established, and not dysfunctional like the families they come from, as my students would call them, the ghetto. Yes, these people that come from these places, some of their relatives include Hispanics, Mexicans included, because they live in these neighborhoods they come with the same behavior.

In conducting a discourse analysis on Iris' transcript it became clear that she never made any positive comments regarding her African-American and Latin@ students. Her countenance was also distinct when discussing certain groups. For example, Iris would lower her head as if in shame or shake her head disapprovingly or even point her finger as if chastising someone when she referred to African-Americans and their parents and also Latin@ students, on the other hand she often smiled and nodded with approval when speaking of white, Asian, or African students and their parents. Iris made many rash generalizations about all African-American students. Admittedly, as an African-American researcher who is the mother of an African-American male child, these comments were difficult to consume. Iris' remarks revealed one of the discomforts of qualitative research: What to do when your sensitivity button is pushed. I address this nuance further in the subjectivity section of the dissertation. Iris stated,

Los niños blancos son más respetuosos que los niños afro-americanos. Ellos no son respetuosos (Field note: lo dijo con énfasis), sin embargo quieren que tú los respetes a ellos mientras no es recíproca. Y los padres son iguales.

White children are more respectful than African-Americans. [African-Americans] are not respectful (Field note: said with emphasis); however, they want you to respect them while it is not reciprocal. And their parents are the same.

Of the parents of her students, Iris also noted distinctions based on race.

Honestamente no he tenido ningún cruce negativo con los padres (blancos) de familias de mis estudiantes. No puedo decir lo mismo de mis padres Afro-Americanos, ellos son un poquito más difíciles de verdad con inmigrantes. Como no aceptan, les cuesta el trabajo acercarse más a los inmigrantes. Ellos te ponen un límite muy marcado. Los padres afro-americanos se quejan de la forma de que yo los trato [a sus hijos].

Honestly I have not had any negative experience with the [white] parents of my students. I cannot say the same of African-American parents, they are a little more difficult, honestly, with immigrants. Since they are not accepting, it's harder for immigrants to get close to them. They put up very obvious boundaries. The African-American parents complain about the way I treat their children.

Iris also found Hispanic children to be disrespectful of public property and in public spaces. She noted,

En Estados Unidos la gente respeta. Yo no sé en otros estados pero por mi experiencia aquí es que la gente les enseña a sus hijos a respetar y a cuidar las cosas en el supermercado. Tú no ves ningún niño americano, ni blanco, ni negro molestando, pero tú ves todos los hispanos jugando con las cosas y tocando, ¿sí o no?

In the United States the people show respect. I don't know about other states but according to my experience here it appears that the people teach their children to respect and to take care of the things in the supermarket. You do not see any American children, white or black bothering things, but you see all the Hispanic kids playing with things and touching things. Yes or no?

It is likely that Iris' negative sentiments of African-American children spilled over into her interactions with them in the classroom. Iris shared that her principal constantly reprimanded her for negative comments and interactions with African-American students and parents. After hearing Iris' opinions of these communities, I concluded that she had antagonistic relationships with African-American students and parents in part due to her negative perceptions of them. I asked Iris if she noted a shift in her students' behavior based on class distinctions. I asked her to consider if her negative observations of minority groups was affected by class, meaning if they were from a lower class background vs. a higher class background did that impact their behavior.

Iris opined that students and parents from more economically stable, professional homes tended to comport better. Azucena did not necessarily see race or class as equalizers. Although she too relayed negative experiences with African-American parents and students, she also gave accounts of students from middle class white professional families who also exhibited less than appropriate behavior.

For example, Azucena relayed the story of working in a predominantly white school where the students did not seem to be accustomed to having black teachers. She had an incident where one white student called her a *bitch* to which she fired back with colorful language. Other white students in her school had drug problems and therefore came to school under the influence. Azucena shared the difficulties of trying to educate students while inebriated. Azucena also gave an account of Asian students who behaved very well, but had *helicopter parents (overly involved)*. When they did not make A's, the parents often equated their lack of performance to the culpability of the teacher. Azucena was in constant battles with Asian parents over their children's grades, nevertheless, she did not alter grades citing the practice as a lack of integrity. In relation to Panama, Azucena, Iris, and Jelly felt that although "youth are youth everywhere (Azucena)" students are more respectful in Panama, reserved with the type of language used in the presence of teachers, and more motivated to excel than U.S. students. Next, given that Jelly is substantially younger than the other participants, I was eager to learn how her responses compared to her Panamanian counterparts.

Jelly came to the United States at age 13 and at the time of this study she was 21 years old. Perhaps due to her youth and having come of age in the United States, Jelly did not judge any group based on the actions of some. Jelly deliberately surrounded herself with an eclectic mix of friends and she is also married to an African-American man. Of her diverse relationships, Jelly stated the following.

Well, overall my friends are blacks, whites, and Hispanics. And actually I have a few friends that are from Thailand and another friend that's Korean. I associate with people that don't discriminate against each other.

In her experiences, Jelly observed both favorable and unfavorable behaviors from all races. To the contrary, Iris and Azucena often contributed uncomplimentary minority behavior to the collective, whereby labeling the well-behaved minority as the exception. In a subsequent section I will present incidents of white racism experienced by participants. I noted that Azucena and Iris judged white obduracy as the exception and not the rule, leaving their dominant hegemon intact.

Both Iris and Azucena offered meritocratic arguments that if these minority groups would have worked harder, they would be further along. In agreement with Iris and Azucena, Ballantine and Spade (2001) wrote, "Modern democratic societies ... are meritocratic; that is, talent and hard work should determine the allocation of individuals to positions, rather than accidents of birth. Thus, in modern societies education becomes the key institution in a meritocratic selection process" (p. 17). Both Iris and Azucena often compared African-American and Latin@s lack of progress to that of whites and/or Asians who they felt were far more progressive. Each woman gave anecdotes of interactions they had with whites or Asians that would put blacks and Latin@s to shame. They seemed to genuinely question if whites and Asians could excel, why couldn't others. Angela Davis (1988) questioned the myth of meritocracy with which she too had been reared.

The prevailing myth then as now is that poverty is a punishment for idleness and indolence. If you had nothing to show for yourself, it meant that you hadn't worked hard enough. I continued to have doubts about this "work and ye shall be rewarded" notion. It didn't make sense to me that all those who had not "made it" were suffering for their lack of desire and the defectiveness of their will to achieve a better life for themselves. If this were true, then, great numbers of our people—perhaps the majority—had really been lazy and shiftless, as white people were always saying. (pgs. 92-93)

By demonstration of intertextuality, Peggy McIntosh (1990) affirmed,

I repeatedly forgot each of the realizations on this list until I wrote it down. For me white privilege has turned out to be an elusive and fugitive subject. The pressure to avoid it is great, for in facing it I must give up the *myth of meritocracy*. If these things are true, this is not such a free country; one's life is not what one makes it; many doors open for certain people through no virtues of their own.

Given that Iris and Azucena are immigrants it is understandable how they might conclude that if they can work hard and *make it* in a foreign land, then others should be able to do the same in their native country; however, neither Panamanian participant seemed to question the historical and sociological impediments that may have contributed to the social and economic disparities observed. I would agree that there must be a conflation of both personal responsibility as well as the acknowledgement of systemic oppression; however, the danger lies in holding a magnifying glass to one and a blindfold to the other. Although Cornel West (2001) also agrees that personal actions must be weighed in that "black murderers and rapists should go to jail," he would also argue that we mustn't dismiss structural variables (p. 25).

What is particularly naïve and peculiarly vicious about the conservative behavioral outlook is that it tends to deny the lingering effect of black history---a history inseparable from though not reducible to victimization. In this way crucial and indispensable themes of self-help and personal responsibility are wrenched out of historical context and contemporary circumstances---as if it is all a matter of personal will. (West, 2001, p. 22)

I considered the implications of the historical imperial domination that has impacted Afro-descendants of today. Foreign invasions and occupations, enslavement resulting in 400-500 years of unpaid labor, the silver and gold system of Panama and the Jim Crow system of the United States have all wielded unquestionable atrocities upon Africa's children. Grabbing the baton over 500 years behind their white and European counterparts, African descendants continue to fall in disadvantaged categories. Ghanaian feminist, Ama Ata Aidoo concluded,

Over the last five hundred years African people have been under all kinds of onslaught—physical, mental, emotional. It seems to me that whatever was left for us to recoup cannot be done unless we see ourselves as a people, as a nation. When I say African nationalism, I am also using the term to embrace the global African world—African-America, African-Caribbean, and so on. When one looks at the contemporary world, one can only be clear by being honest. We African people are at the bottom of the human pile. We have to rescue ourselves as our own people. We are not threatening anybody, but we need *us*. (Needham & Aidoo, 1995, p. 125-126)

I am a strong advocate for building networks of solidarity across groups. I believe it is imperative that we work across borders, oceans, highways, and isles, but I do agree with Aidoo that European domination is one of the factors that has disintegrated the diaspora. As a result, African communities are now divided by nationality, language, customs, and traditions. Mohanty (2003) explained,

Racism in the context of colonialism and imperialism takes the form of simultaneous naturalization and abstraction. It works by erasing the economic, political and historical exigencies that necessitate the essentialist discourse of race as a way to legitimate imperialism in the first place. (p. 61)

I agree with Mohanty that a goal of imperialism is to essentialize race in such a way that other forms of oppression become abstract. As with any movement, such as feminism, there are always intersecting threads that lead to domination which cannot be ignored. Within the context of this study, although my participants diverge in terms of nationality, class, and education, the intersections of ethnicity (Latinas) and gender (women) unite them all. It is imperative to analyze how the legacies of imperialism, slavery, racism, classism and sexism have worked to subjugate marginalized people throughout the African diaspora. I hope that one accomplishment that might spring forth from this dissertation is a greater understanding of how these *isms* have served to disadvantage broad bases of African descendants. With this knowledge, perhaps we can collectively work towards Aidoo's vision of "embracing the global African world."

In contrast to Iris and Azucena's perceptions of blacks and Latin@s, I did not observe similar sentiments amongst Guatemalan and Dominican participants. To the contrary, the Dominican participants felt just the opposite. They felt overtly disparaged and discriminated against by whites and embraced by blacks. Julia affirmed, "los morenos, la verdad es que son tan nice, tan chévere, no he tenido ningún problema. Pero de los blancos sí, que son racistas." *The truth is that the blacks are so nice, so cool, I have not had any problems. But the whites, yes, they are racists.* Economically speaking, the Dominicans made it clear that their livelihood was dependent upon black patronage. Blanca explained that her clientele is made up of "morenas todas. Entonces, hay hispanas muy pocas. Creo que tengo como unas cinco clientas nada más." *All black women. So, there are very few Hispanics. I believe I have like no more than five Hispanic clients.* In my observation at the Dominican salon over several days and hours, I observed countless African-American patrons, but never any other races. The Dominican participants did not share any negative experiences with blacks or Hispanics, and they appreciated the way that black women supported their business at the hair salon. The salon appears to be a place where there is undeniable *interest convergence*, albeit amongst minority groups. The Dominicans are providing a service that black women esteem, hence keeping the flow of minority dollars within minority communities. These same dollars often make their way back to Latin American families and serve as an economic boost to relatives abroad.

Both the Dominicans' and the Panamanians' perceptions of minority communities were based in part on their work interactions. Here I would make a similar comparison to the Guatemalans whose experiences of race were somewhat restricted due to language barriers. The Dominicans Julia and María did not speak English. Out of five stylists employed at the salon, only one, Blanca, spoke English. Whereas salons and barber shops are typically places where both light-hearted and deeply pensive dialogues can be overheard, conversations were somewhat

restricted in the Dominican salon. Due to the language barrier, the Spanish-speaking stylists tended to converse amongst themselves in Spanish while the English speaking patrons spoke amongst themselves in English. Also, given the age of communication, both stylists and patrons often were engaged in social media, internet browsing, or conversations via their smart phones. During my salon observations the stylists had dialogues with their African-American clients, but these encounters were very limited and relegated to only discussions of the services that were being received. The stylists who were limited in English knew the language of their profession in English sufficiently well, but often relied on an interpreter even when discussing haircare. I noted during my observations that outside of discussions of haircare, there was little conversation or interaction on any other topics. Also, in my conversations with salon patrons, they spoke extremely highly of the salon stylists' haircare and professionalism, but they had not interacted with the stylists on deeper levels due to the language barrier. Notwithstanding I was still able to glean meaningful observations from what I saw and what I heard from the isolated conversations.

Negotiations of Racism: “[T]here is a lot of racism here.”

Narratives of Racism and Discrimination in the United States

According to Johnson (2006), “[R]acism is also built in to the systems that people live and work in. It’s embedded in a capitalist system organized around competition over scarce resources, and organized to be white-dominated, white-identified, and white-centered” (p. 104). With the exception of the Guatemalans, regardless of their class level, race, or country of origin, most participants reported being victims of racism, discrimination, and/or colorism in the United States. “Racism is the patterns of privilege and oppression themselves and *anything*—intentional or not—that helps to create or perpetuate those patterns” (Johnson, 2006, p. 105). Participants negotiated racist exchanges and/or experiences of colorism in various ways and subsequently they

read and analyzed them with diverse lenses. No matter the affront, what stood out to me in the analysis was that participants did not passively accept racist acts. By and large they found ways to confront racism civilly, but directly.

When asked to relay experiences of racism, all Dominican and Panamanian participants seemed clear on what racism was and how they had experienced it. They reported these occurrences to have taken place when trying to operate in public institutions or locations such as schools, supermarkets, bingo parlors, and parks of recreation. The setting in which the subjugation occurred determined how the participants negotiated and confronted the exchanges.

To my surprise both Iris and Azucena relayed racist or discriminatory events that took place in the same supermarket chain that caters to Latin@ and international patrons. Due to the supermarket's multicultural clientele, it is an ideal setting for consumers to be forced to negotiate cross-cultural encounters. Iris reported that as she was selecting vegetables from the produce area, she and a white U.S. patron reached for the same selection simultaneously. Iris narrated the following.

Yo estaba comprando vegetales y yo extendí la mano al mismo tiempo que ella [una mujer blanca] y ella me dice, "Don't touch me," ("She said that!?" asked Krishauna), [yes] she say (sic) that. And I said, "I'm sorry but I don't want to touch you." Y he tenido que aprender de mantener mi distancia porque es cosa que no tengo que aprender en Panama. Pero yo he tenido que aprender que los grupos, especialmente los blancos y negros quieren su espacio.

I was shopping for vegetables and I reached for them at the same time as she did [a white woman] and she said to me, "Don't touch me," ("She said that!?" asked Krishauna), [Yes] she say (sic) that. And I said, "I'm sorry but I don't want to touch you." I have had to learn to maintain my distance because it's something that I did not have to learn in Panama. But I have had to learn that the groups, especially whites and blacks want their space.

Iris revealed that she felt the woman's comments were racially motivated. She also felt the encounter was due to cultural nuances of *space*, whereas U.S. blacks and whites observe more

personal space than Latin@s. Similarly, Azucena had an unpleasant experience while shopping in the same supermarket chain, albeit over 80 miles away.

Azucena explained that she was taking her time to select her meats because she wanted to be sure to choose good quality cuts. Azucena thought it important to describe the woman's physical features so that I would understand why she felt her comments were racially and culturally motivated. Azucena stated,

[T]his *Hispanic* (Field note: *Hispanic* said with emphasis) that looked *nativish*, well what I call native because they look, what we call *cholo*, we call them *cholo*. And this cholo lady, she was Mexican or..., because it's not to think that we are more intelligent or smarter but some of them I would say they don't have this big educational background so they think that every black only speak (sic) English.

According to the participants, the terms *nativish* or *cholo* in a Panamanian context refers to a light skinned Latin@ or what one might term a "typical" looking Latin@ who does not appear too indigenous or too black. Azucena then connected the woman's level of education to her assumed Mexican nationality. This correlation may expose an unnamed bias or stereotyping towards Mexican immigrants. Azucena gave several supporting stories of Latin@s who spoke Spanish indiscriminately around her, assuming that she was African-American and would not understand. Uninhibited by confrontation, Azucena always negotiated these exchanges by directly exposing her Panamanian heritage and hence her ability to speak Spanish. She confronted Latinas' remarks head on. Bilingually, Azucena reported the following account.

So I'm here looking at the meat and she came behind me so I took a while because I like to select what I like to select and she was like, "Esta negra, por qué no se quita de aquí!" [This black woman, why doesn't she get out of here?] Y yo le dije, "Pues esta negra está aquí antes que tú, y así tienes que esperar." [I told her, well this black woman is here before you, and therefore you have to wait.] She was so scared that that woman flew because she didn't want any meat anymore, porque esta negra está grande y ella es chaparra [because this black woman is big and she is small]. Ella salió [she left] without it. She just flew and that was not my only experience.

The Latina woman racialized her comments by referring to Azucena's race, which is one reason that Azucena felt the encounter was in part due to colorism and the woman's lighter skin privilege. Colorism is prejudice and/or discrimination against darker skinned individuals, usually among members of the same race or ethnicity. According to Hill Collins (2009),

[C]olorism in the U.S. context operates the way that it does because it is deeply embedded in a *distinctly American* (emphasis mine) form of racism grounded in black/white oppositional differences. Other groups of color must negotiate the meaning attached to their color. All must position themselves within a continually renegotiated color hierarchy where, because they define the top and the bottom, the meanings attached to whiteness and blackness change much less than we think. (p. 98)

Although I agree in part with Hill Collins' (2009) assessment of colorism and the negotiation of color, I would trouble the notion that black/white binary oppositions are "distinctly American." As my research has shown, this binary is alarmingly prevalent throughout Latin America both past and present.

Azucena was determined to let the woman know that not only did she not appreciate her racial insult, but also that she, being Latina, fully understood the woman's affront. Along with race and ethnicity, Azucena was aware that her presence as a plus sized woman was striking and for some, even cause for intimidation. Azucena relayed another experience while at the bingo parlor in which a Latina assumed that she was not Latina and therefore spoke about her disparagingly in Spanish. Azucena remarked, "She was a white lady, maybe a mix like Italian but definitely white. They consider themselves white too. She looked kind of Hispanic." Although Azucena was not 100% certain of the mother's ethnicity, she knew that she and her daughters spoke Spanish and had white skin privilege. As Azucena was already seated at the table playing bingo, a large family of Latina women entered the establishment. They wanted the lone Azucena to move from the large table so that they could occupy it. Instead of asking her politely, they

proceeded to overtake the table with their personal items in an attempt to force Azucena to relocate. Bilingually, Azucena continued with the story.

Suddenly the youngest one told her sister “*be careful with the lady you gonna (sic) make her move.*” And she said, well “Siga, mejor así se va, así le echamos.” [Continue, it’s better if she leaves, that way we can kick her out]. Y yo le dije, “**Mira no seas ignorante. El hecho de que yo no me vea como tú no significa que yo no hable español.**” [I told her, look, don’t be ignorant. The fact that I don’t look like you doesn’t mean that I don’t speak Spanish]. La mamá dijo, “Yo no soy ignorante.” [The mom said, I am not ignorant] Yo dije, “Sí eres ignorante porque cuando tú vas a decir este tipo de cosa asegúrate que la persona no sabe hablar español.” [I said, yes you are ignorant because when you are going to say that sort of thing make sure that the person doesn’t know how to speak Spanish]. She couldn’t, she didn’t have a clue of what was going on. And I say, “**Yes, you’re ignorant. You think that I have to look like you to be able to speak Spanish?**” So they were just there and they didn’t say anything and then the mother was very mad but I didn’t care because I say if you don’t educate your daughter then you gonna (sic) have to stand the consequences because you don’t know who you’re sitting beside so you have to just learn to respect. **I would never go by a person because I see they look black and think that they don’t speak Spanish because,** “Esos son muy ignorantes,” es lo que yo le dije que “**yo no tengo que ser chola para hablar español.**” [These types are very ignorant, that’s what I told her, I don’t have to be *chola* to speak Spanish].

Like the previous encounter in the supermarket, Azucena felt that she was being denigrated because she was assumed to be African-American. She felt Latin@s often used Spanish as a weapon against those who they perceive as anglo-speaking. Azucena’s anecdotes reveal that some Latin@s automatically view blacks as *other* and not as their fellow country(wo)men.

Laurent-Perrault (2010) found a community of Afro-Latin@s in Philadelphia “whose stories were painful as they concerned experiences of rejection, prejudice, and discrimination within the Latino community” (p. 92). Coming to the United States and speaking with other Afro-Latin@s regarding their plights solidified for Laurent-Perrault that she “was not alone and that [her] impression that the Latin@ community harbored racist values was not unique” (Laurent-Perrault, 2010, p. 92). Like Azucena, Laurent-Perrault noted that many Latin@s assumed that she

was not Latina and were surprised when she spoke Spanish fluently. Similar to Laurent-Perrault's Philadelphia experience, Cruz-Janzen (2001) relayed the following.

Two years ago at a conference in California I got on an elevator with two Latinas who, upon seeing me, switched their conversation from English to Spanish. When I asked them a question in flawless Spanish, they seemed surprised and remarked, "**You don't look Latina!**" They attempted to conceal their embarrassment and explained their surprise by telling me, "Nosotros tenemos personas como usted en nuestro país." We [Latino whites] have persons like *you* [Latino blacks] in our own country. It reaffirmed my belief that Latinos in the United States prefer to deny my legitimate group membership. Their subtle, yet powerful, implication asserts that *Latinegros* (Latinos of obvious African ancestry), are not true compatriots in their respective countries or in the United States. Within their native countries and within Latino groups in the United States, **Latinegros live as foreigners of both locations.** (p. 172)

Cruz-Janzen (2001) explained the unsettling reality of being a foreigner in two locations; however, for both Jelly and Blanca, experiencing racism in the United States was jolting given that they had never been victims of racism in their countries of origin. Jelly stated,

Well in Panama there is basically like a little bit of every culture like there is Jewish culture, there's Asian culture, there's Spanish culture. But the Spanish, we have different kinds of skin colors so it's not like discriminatory. We all have fun, it's not any discriminatory (sic) that I know of. I don't see any discrimination.

I clarified, "So you never observed *any* racial discrimination while living in Panama?" To which Jelly responded, "No ma'am." Although one could assume that since she attended school in Panama, there may have been plenty of opportunity to have experienced racism, it may be of import that Jelly left Panama when she was 13 years old; therefore, her youth may have shielded her from society's depravities. As previously noted, Iris too felt there was no racism in Panama; however, Azucena offered several examples to the contrary. Also, whereas Blanca had no experiences with racism in the Dominican Republic, both María and Julia disagreed. Although their responses were discordant with respect to their native countries, most respondents were

quick to point out the prevalence of racism in the United States. Jelly and Blanca relayed experiences of racism in U.S. schools.

Jelly stated that when she was in high school in the United States, she had been active on the cheerleading team. When they had a black cheerleading coach the team had been racially diverse and inclusive; however, when that coach left the school, a new white coach stepped in. After tryouts, the candidates were perturbed to learn that none of the black or Latina students made the team, the team was all white.

So my junior year my [black] cheerleading instructor she had to retire that year, she stopped teaching completely so the [white] lady that had been there before, she came back and was again the cheerleading instructor. So when there were cheerleading tryouts, none of the girls that I was cheering with made the cut because most of them were of color. Well even though there were a few that were also white, they made it but we didn't because of the fact that we were of color. I don't feel like this is right because before she came back we actually had an interracial cheerleading squad. But when she came back all you have is one straight race which I believe is racist.

Jelly tried to renegotiate the outcome by initiating a petition where she amassed almost 150 signatures from fellow students. I asked her from where she had learned activism skills and how to strategize when faced with injustice. Jelly stated that she learned how to initiate petitions and work through hierarchies from her fellow students of all races who understood better how U.S. institutions worked. She also stated that she had seen such an initiative executed on television. Jelly took care to ensure that the signatures were from a large cross section of the school and representative of the school's diversity. By way of white privilege, Jelly felt the cheerleading instructor intercepted her efforts. Jelly noted,

But somehow [the white coach] found out about the petition and she went to talk to [the principal] before I got to him and by the time I got there it was like she had already poisoned his mind. And she got away with it and there was nothing I could do about it.

As a result, Jelly walked away from cheerleading altogether and played rugby instead. I was heartbroken that racism had forced Jelly to abandon a sport that she loved. I was even more broken that although she had done everything right in terms of working within the system to promote change, the system had failed her and her fellow classmates. Blanca too had to confront white racism in U.S. schools.

Blanca explained that when she first moved to the United States her children were young school age students. When she went to register them she found that they had to attend two separate schools due to their ages. Her daughter went to a predominantly black school and Blanca reported having no issues there. Her other two children attended a predominantly white school where they were met with great discrimination and resistance due to being limited in English proficiency. Blanca felt the school wanted to label the children as unintelligent because they were Hispanic instead of working with them to assist them with English language learning. Blanca reported,

Y a los dos niños que estaban en diferentes escuelas como ellos estaban en una escuela de blancos entonces la hembra me la pusieron en una escuela de morenos. Y allí en la escuela de blancos mis hijos pasaron mucho trabajo. Tuvimos que ir a quejarnos con el director del condado. Por eso, sí fuimos *downtown*, porque discriminaron mucho los dos niños porque no saben hablar inglés. Pasaron mucho trabajo, pero aprendieron inglés a los seis meses y a los tres sabían hablar inglés. Eran bien inteligentes.

And the two kids that were in different schools, they were in the white school, then they placed my other daughter in a black school. And there in the white school my children had many issues. We had to go to complain with the director of the county. For this reason, we went downtown, because they discriminated a lot against my two children because they did not know how to speak English. It was very difficult, but they learned English in about six months and all three of them knew how to speak English. They were very intelligent.

Misjudging and misdiagnosing English Language Learners' (ELL) is commonly reported by Latin@ parents. Since most U.S. teachers are monolingual and have had neither direct experience

nor sufficient training with ELLs, the students are often mislabeled and erroneously placed in special needs programs. I was quite impressed by Blanca given that she too was an ELL; however, she was able to work through the ranks making it all the way to Central Office to advocate for her children. Often times Latin@ parents get lost in the shuffle of the ever present language barrier. It was eye-opening to learn how Blanca did not allow herself to be intimidated by the school's bureaucracy, but negotiated for her children to have equitable treatment and to have their language needs met.

Finally, María and Julia conveyed racist behavior toward them while enjoying a leisurely day at the lake. Unfortunately, as the day was coming to a close, María discovered that she had locked her keys in the car. She realized that she had neither hardware tools nor the skill to remove them so she went to seek help. She found a group of white men fishing and attempted to explain the situation, albeit in broken English. María asked them if they could try to assist her. The remaining details of the encounter follow.

Fui donde un blanco y le dije que por favor me ayudara, teniendo las herramientas que me ayudara, en su forma muy mala me dijo <<DONT TOUCH! GET OUT!>> Como que me fuera en inglés. Ni siquiera me dio la oportunidad de explicarle lo que estaba pasando. **Entonces yo veo que con los blancos, sí hay mucho racismo aquí en Carolina del Norte.**

I approached a white man and I said to him, please help me, having the tools to help me, in his very bad form he said to me, "DON'T TOUCH! GET OUT!" He said it to me like that in English. He didn't even give me the opportunity to explain what had happened. **So I see with whites, yes there is a lot of racism here in North Carolina.**

Julia continued,

Después de eso se juntaron un grupito entre ellos a mirarme. No les importaba que estuviera cayendo la noche y que viajáramos lejos y ellos viviendo por allí, o pudiendo llamar a la policía o algo porque tampoco había señal para hablar con teléfono. Yo dije podían hacer algo como hombres. Me sentí mal porque éramos dos mujeres. ¿Me

entiendes? Sentí mal hasta que un mexicano, un señor, llegó y dio la mano y gracias a él pudimos abrir el carro. Y duró como dos horas pero eso se agradece, que trató.

Afterward a little group of them gathered around staring at me. It didn't matter to them that it was getting dark and that we were traveling far away and they living around there, or being able to call the police or something because there was also not a signal on our phones to call; I said they could at least do something, being men. I felt bad because we were two women. You understand? I felt bad until a Mexican, a man, came and gave us a hand and thanks to him we could open the car. It took two hours but we are grateful that he tried.

Neither María nor Julia had the language skills to negotiate the situation. They were simply left being yelled at, grimaced at, ignored, and feeling in harm's way. Both women reported feeling humiliated. They communicated several other stories of discrimination with various agencies such as banks and utility companies. Unfortunately all of these encounters caused María and Julia to conclude that whites in North Carolina are racist. María compared these racist experiences in North Carolina to other regions of the United States where she had lived such as New York and Florida. She concluded that as beautiful as North Carolina is with all of its economic opportunities, it was indeed a more racist state.

Negotiations of Race and Identity: *Nationality First*: "I am not Mexican or African-American!"

One of the reasons that María reported being treated poorly was that unlike in New York and Florida, in North Carolina there is a common assumption that all Latin@s are Mexicans. Unfortunately, Mexicans have met the disdain of some. Being confused with Mexicans was a collective narrative amongst the participants. Since none of my participants are Mexican, they found various ways of negotiating the fallacious supposition: sometimes by confrontation and other times by education. When María first moved to North Carolina from Florida she needed to have the electricity connected in her apartment, thinking that she was performing a fairly routine task, she was stunned to find that her request was met with resistance. The operator explained to

María that she could not have electricity until an investigation was complete and they were satisfied that she was a responsible payer. The representative explained to her that he had had many problems in the past with Mexican consumers, to which María countered,

Yo siempre pagué luz. En Miami tenía todo hasta que yo me tuve que mudar y le dije que si me están discriminando, ¿por qué me hicieron eso si yo estaba al día con todo y siempre he tenido energía eléctrica? Que tenía que investigarme porque yo **como una mexicana**... Bueno yo le dije que **yo no era Mexicana que era Latina**. Tenían que investigarme porque yo como latina ellos tenían que investigar, incluso llamaron hasta el manager [del apartamento] para saber cómo era mi record y como yo estaba para ellos entonces instalarme la luz. Entonces porque yo le dije tantas cosas entonces ellos se dieron. **Y me he visto sí en situaciones que los blancos me menosprecian.**

I have always paid for my electricity. In Miami I had everything until I had to relocate and I told him that if they are discriminating against me, why are they doing that if I was current with everything and always had electricity. They said they had to investigate me **because I was a Mexican**... Well, I told him, **I am not Mexican, I am Latina**. As a Latina they had to investigate me, they even called the apartment manager to see how my record was and what type of candidate I was to have the lights installed. Well, since I said so many things they finally gave in. **And I have seen that yes in situations that whites look down on me.**

Jelly also reported being consistently confused with being Mexican. She stated,

Then they hear an accent come out and then they will ask me “oh where you from” and they, well most people automatically say that I’m from Mexico (Field note: Jelly laughs). **So I correct them and tell them well Mexico is not the only Spanish country out there.** So then I tell them that I’m from Panama and they may proceed to think that I’m saying Panama, Florida. So I have to let them know Panama the country. So most people don’t go out of the country so they don’t really know what’s outside of the United States except for Mexico and Canada. Or they know about South America, but they don’t really know about Central America.

Similarly, Azucena recalled that her students also assumed that she was Mexican. She relayed,

When I got here the kids used to ask me “are you a Mexican-Panamanian?” They thought Panama was in México. They thought every immigrant who come (sic) here they came from México. They ask you did you swim over and things like that and I was like *really?*

Whereas María argued with the operator and even overtly accused him of discrimination, Jelly, Iris, and Azucena tried to educate others and rid them of misassumptions. For example, Iris was so frustrated with North Carolinians confusing her with Mexicans that she began to carry a Latin American map with her to show them where Panama was in relation to Mexico and the United States. After a student did not understand how it was that Iris was black, but spoke Spanish, the student inquired,

Entonces le pregunté, ¿qué crees que soy? ¡Y me dijo Mexican! ¿Por qué? Porque hablo español. Para ellos (estudiantes), todas las personas que hablan español son mexicanas. Y yo le dije no, **yo no soy mexicana, yo soy panameña** y me preguntaron ¿dónde está? ¿Panama está en México? Y le dije no, Panama está en Centroamérica. Y fue cuando decidí siempre tener un mapa en mi sala de clase para enseñarles a mis niños de donde soy, de donde vengo.

So I asked him, “What do you think I am?” And he said, “Mexican!” “Why?” Because I speak Spanish. For them (students), everyone who speaks Spanish is Mexican. And I told him, **“No, I am not Mexican, I am Panamanian.”** And they asked, “Where is that? Is Panama in Mexico?” And I told him, “Panama is in Central America.” And that was when I decided to always have a map in my classroom to teach my kids where I am from.

Ironically, several times throughout the interviews I found that my participants had also constructed negative views of Mexicans. Previously I detailed the adverse comments made by Iris and Azucena concerning Mexicans. Julia explained that she is often confused as African-American and spoken to in English as a result. Although she seemed to be speaking in jest, Julia stated,

Sí [americanos] piensan que soy de aquí, en realidad siempre me suelen hablar en inglés. Y bueno, ellos me confunden con morena. Entonces, bueno mejor, para que no me confundan con una mexicana, no tengo yo problema.

Yes, they [Americans] always think that I am from here, in reality they always speak to me in English. And well, they confuse me with an African-American. Fine with me, as long as they don't confuse me for Mexican I don't have a problem with it.

When making this statement Julia laughed and displayed her effortless sense of humor; therefore, I am not certain how seriously she took this statement. Nevertheless, it reveals that she has internalized sentiments of Mexican inferiority on some level and has made a negotiation that it is better to be thought of as African-American than Mexican.

Although they did not name Mexicans, both María and Julia remarked that some Latin@s cast a negative light on hard working, law abiding Latin@ immigrants.

María: Muchos [inmigrantes] vienen a trabajar. Muchos vienen a ganarse la vida fácil como en todos sitios. Muchos vienen a meterse en gangas de drogas, ganarse el dinero fácil para irse y hay otros como yo que venimos a trabajar honradamente. Lamentablemente así venimos.

Many immigrants come to work. Many come to make easy money like in any location. Many come to get into drug gangs, to make easy money to get ahead, and others like me come to work honorably. Unfortunately, this is the way that we come.

Julia: Que no estamos de acuerdo con los pandilleros. *We are not in agreement with the gangs.*

María: Es una cosa mala. *It's a bad thing.*

María and Julia opined that it was important to distinguish them as law-abiding immigrants even if it meant demarcating Latin@s of ill repute. Unfortunately, racial and ethnic minorities are often judged as a collective while whites and other dominant groups are judged as individuals. In McIntosh's (1990) infamous list of unearned white privileges she noted, "I can swear, or dress in second hand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race" (p. 32). In the eyes of many, any negative practice on the part of a few boasts negatively for all members of minority groups. For this reason, it is common for minorities to try to distance themselves from poorly behaving members

of their group or to attempt to explain the behavior away. These are negotiations that few whites and members of majority groups have to consider.

My participants were often forced to declare their identities based on what they *are not*: neither Mexican nor African-American. Upon learning that they spoke Spanish my participants were immediately read as Mexicans, and in the case of the darker skinned participants they were racialized as African-Americans. In both instances the fallacious categorizations caused the participants to be met with colorism, racism, discrimination, and/or ill treatment. Ironically, the participants were not only misnamed by U.S. whites and blacks, but also by their fellow Latin@s who consistently *othered* them, causing them to feel like foreigners amongst their own. As seen when combating discrimination, the participants did not hesitate to directly counter both the mis-categorizations as well as the accompanying racism.

Factors that Influence Latin@s' Self-Identification

Demonstrating the strategic agency that some Latin@s assume when selecting their racial identity, Afro-Mexican, Rosario Jackson (2010) reported,

I recognized that college admission offices weren't responding to the "other" category in a way that advanced my goals. That's when I figured out that labels, a necessary evil, lead to sorting, which can have long-reaching consequences. I learned to depersonalize the categories and have become *strategic* when I check boxes. The boxes are no longer a source of emotional turmoil for me. The boxes are boxes. I understand them. I have learned how they are used and how to use them. I check them when I must but they don't define who I am. (p. 438)

Relatedly, I asked participants how they tended to identify their race or ethnicity on United States official documents and forms. All Dominican participants elected not to select any racial category but instead solely identified as Hispanic or Latina. Dominican participants reported feeling more connected to their national identity than racial or ethnic. Although race is identified on the official Dominican identification card, called a *cédula*, participants made the negotiation to forgo this

practice while residing in the United States. While two of the participants, María and Blanca, are considered white in the Dominican, I wonder if their racist experiences with U.S. whites caused them to distance themselves from a U.S. white racial construct. In the United States, Julia, a brown skinned Dominican was often confused as African-American. She had a very good relationship with U.S. blacks; however, she did not identify as African-American. She had recently immigrated to the United States only the previous year, perhaps causing her to assume more of a national identity given her close ties with her homeland. Whatever their reasons, the Dominicans were eager to assert their *latinidad* while residing in the United States. Conversely, the Panamanian participants differed in this regard.

Afro Panamanian Iris explained that, unlike in the Dominican Republic, in Panama one would rarely be asked to identify her/his race. Iris stated,

En Panama nunca te pregunta de qué raza eres, nunca te pregunta de qué etnia eres. Esa figura no existe. Qué pregunta...¿si eres panameña o no? Pero no hay pregunta de qué etnia eres, eso no existe. (¿Piensa que es algo positivo? Pregunta Krishauna)
Definitivamente es una cosa positiva. En Panama a veces te piden una foto para tu record solamente para llevar un control porque hay mucha gente que tiene el mismo nombre.

In Panama you are never asked what race you are or what ethnicity you are. This figure does not exist. What do they ask you...if you are Panamanian or not. But there is no question about what ethnicity you are, this does not exist. (Do you think this is something that is positive? Krishauna asked.) Definitely it is a positive thing. In Panama sometimes they ask you for a photo for your record only to have a control because there are many people with the same name.

As a point of clarification, since Iris was residing in the United States at the time of the most recent Panamanian Census she may have been unaware of new developments in Panama. As of 2010, under the administration of Ricardo Martinelli (2009-2014), for the first time since 1940 the Panamanian Census did in fact pose questions of race and ethnicity to respondents. I followed up by asking Iris if she felt that by omitting the race question, even on official forms and reports, it was a way to minimize or to deny the salience and prevalence of race in Panama. Iris

responded, “No, No. Absolutamente no estoy de acuerdo con eso porque la raza si la puede ver, se puede palparse. Yo no crecí con estas figuras y nunca sentí incomoda y nadie se siente incómodo.” *No, no. I absolutely disagree with that because race is something that you can see, you can touch it and feel it. I did not grow up with those figures and I never felt uncomfortable and no one feels uncomfortable.*

Panamanian Scholar, Melva Lowe de Goodin (2012), staunchly disagreed with Iris’ conclusions. The 2010 Census reflected that only 9.2% of all Panamanians self-identified as black. Obviously not a true reflection of Panama’s black population, Lowe de Goodin (2010) concluded,

Estos resultados reflejan la acostumbrada negación de la realidad numérica de la población negra en Panama, y generó muchas denuncias de parte de los voceros de las organizaciones afrodescendientes. No solamente protestaron por las irregularidades denunciadas en el ejercicio censal; también protestaron por la actitud de los gobernantes en querer promover a Panama como un país en donde existe total armonía racial. (p. 104)

These irregularities reflect the common denial of the numerical reality of the black population of Panama, and generated many complaints on the part of spokespersons for afro-descendent organizations. They not only protested due to the irregularities reported in the census exercises; they also protested because of the attitude of the government officials who wish to promote Panama as a country where total racial harmony exists. (p. 104)

Upon residing in the United States Afro Panamanian participants Azucena (mother) and Jelly (daughter) reported making negotiations about which racial and ethnic boxes to check when completing forms. Jelly reported that when taking the SAT exam she actually tried to mark both *black* and *Hispanic*; however, the proctor told her that she had to choose one or the other. Never having made the distinction before in her native Panama, Jelly was left confused and unsure of which to choose. In this instance the exam proctor encouraged her to select *Hispanic* since she was a recent immigrant from Panama. The proctor’s insistence that Jelly divide her identity in half, pushing one to the forefront while disregarding the other, is quite problematic. It is even

more unsettling that an outsider decided for Jelly what her identity would be. Jelly's mother, Azucena, on the other hand, defiantly selects both *black* and *Hispanic* when completing forms, thereby refusing to fragment any part of her heritage. Both Azucena and Jelly accepted and understood that they were racially black though ethnically Latinas. They were left confused by a system that rests on an either/or rather than both/and mentality.

Perceptions and Assumptions about Afro-Latin@s: I am not African-American!

Along with the perceptions that my participants have of other ethnic groups, they also explained the perceptions that others have of them. In addition to assuming that some are Mexicans, my darker skinned participants are often confused with African-Americans. Given the low social standing with which some whites view blacks, some of my participants negotiated this liminal space by quickly asserting their *Latinidad over their blackness*, others used the opportunity to assert acts of resistance. Such is the case with Panamanian scholar, Yvette Modestín (2010). Regardless of her credentials, Modestín learned that she is “immediately placed at a disadvantage because of the color of [her] skin” (as cited in Bonilla-Silva, 2004, p. 932). Modestín (2010) reported being equally shocked when she learned that “when [white] people find out [she is] *not* African-American, they think better of [her]” often categorizing her as “a different kind of black” (p. 419). Having had very positive experiences with African-American women, Modestín (2010) refused to ingratiate herself to whites by acquiescing to their indulgence. African-American women consistently stated to Modestín (2010), “We have so much in common as black women and as women. They were more receptive to me and to the conversation on the lack of inclusion of Afro-Latinas. They embraced me in my wholeness, a black Latina woman” (p. 419). Jelly felt the way that whites exoticized black internationals was wrong; however, she saw her *Latinidad* as a way of isolating herself from negative black stereotypes. Jelly explained the following.

Actually my friends ask me all the time, like we get into this conversation like oh well some of the black people [African-Americans] are making the other black people look bad because of the way they act and the things that they do and they get in trouble at such a young age. And I'm like well you can't judge all black people for some people. So I mean I don't discriminate against them at all but I'm proud of my Panamanians (Field note: Jelly laughs).

Obviously Jelly understands the fallacy in judging all African-Americans based on the actions of some, but she excerpts pride in her Panamanian heritage as a negotiation of black condescension.

Iris, on the other hand, consistently distanced herself from African-Americans based on her *Latinidad* and she agreed with whites' negative perceptions of African-American women. Iris explained,

La mayoría cuando me ve, que no hablan conmigo piensan que soy una más, un poco diferente pero una más de los Afro-Americanos. Yo diría que me ha ido bien. **Ellos (los blancos) me aceptan, yo creo que el momento que ven que no soy afro-americana su condición cambia.** Me aceptan más, los blancos que los afro-americanos. Pienso que me aceptan porque no soy de aquí y no tengo la reacción de que yo he percibido del afro-americano. [Los Afro-Americanos] no son muy amigables en algunas ocasiones. No lo son. Mantienen su distancia a la defensiva.

The majority of people when they see me, if they don't speak to me then they think I am just one more, a little different but just one more African-American. I would say that things have gone well. **Whites accept me, I believe that the moment that they see that I am not African-American their outlook changes.** They accept me more, whites more than African-Americans. I think that they accept me because I am not from here and don't have the reaction that I have perceived of the African-American. African-Americans are not very nice on some occasions. They simply are not. They maintain their distance on the defensive.

Throughout my interviews with Iris I noted that she unfailingly esteemed whites and white behaviors while disdaining African-Americans and Mexicans. Hill-Collins (2009) analyzed this phenomenon well. She wrote,

As the Others, U.S. blacks are assigned all of the negative characteristics opposite and inferior to those reserved for whites. By claiming that [black women are] not really "black," [their] friends unintentionally validate this system of racial meanings and

encourage [them] to internalize those images. Although most black women typically resist being objectified as the Other, these controlling images remain powerful influences on our relationships with whites, black men, other racial/ethnic groups, and one another. (p. 97)

In order to debunk dominant narratives and the propensity of some white liberals to categorize black women as *other*, the following account responds to the need for solidarity. Dismayed by attempts to separate her from her African-American counterparts, Afro-Panamanian Modestín (2010) reported that whites embraced her the moment they found out that she was Panamanian and not African-American. Combatting the separation experienced by Modestín & upholding the need for solidarity, Afro-Cuban feminist hip hop rapper Pelusa, of the socially conscious lesbian group Las Krudas, explained,

We think that for us it is absolutely necessary to be feminists...Because to be feminists, for us--- is the balance that we need to live in this society *tan machista* that is so sexist. *We know that women in the world need a lot of support today from other women. We give much solidarity so that our self-esteem becomes higher and higher.* (Armstead, 2007, p. 107)

As explicated by Las Krudas, African descendant women have struggled to redeem solidarity and self-esteem resulting from years of living in societies that seek to eradicate both. Iris, on the other hand, was more accepting of black internationals such as Africans and Caribbeans as well as Latin@s of any race from anywhere but Mexico. From Iris' previous quote, one concludes that she not only is in accordance with dominant perceptions of U.S. blacks, but she also feels she is distinct from them and their unwelcomed behaviors. She is relieved that whites regard her with esteem once they are aware that she is not *one of us*.

Alternatively, activist Angela Davis (2004) resisted whites who tried to esteem her at the disposal of African-Americans. Davis (2004) narrated an experience in the 1960s when Jim Crow was in full effect. She entered a white only establishment but pretended to be a black

international: her experience proves that essentializing black exoticism has been a practice for some time. Given that Davis and her sister Fania spoke fluent French, they could easily pass as black internationals. Davis (2004) narrated,

The white people in the store were at first confused when they saw two black people sitting in the “whites only” section, but when they heard our accents and conversations in French, they too seemed to be pleased and excited by seeing black people from so far away they could not possibly be a threat. Eventually I signaled to Fania that it was time to wind up the game. We looked at him: his foolish face and obsequious grin, one eye-blink away from the scorn he would have registered as automatically as a trained hamster had he known we were local residents. We burst out laughing. “Is something funny he whispered?” Suddenly I knew English and told him that he was what was so funny. **“All black people have to do is pretend they come from another country, and you treat us like dignitaries.”** My sister and I got up, still laughing, and left the store.

These scenarios described by Modestín (2010), Iris, and Davis (2004) reveal the manifold effects of European imperialism. From the beginning white colonizers and slave masters sought to disintegrate Africa’s children by separating them by language, country, and family lineage. In many regards whites have been successful at instigating black on black conflicts in order to attain the white ideal. As previously quoted, Aidoo admonished African descendants to combat the effects of colonialism, colonization, and imperialism by rejecting white disintegration tactics such as those afore described.

Aidoo (1995) wrote,

It seems to me that whatever was left for us to recoup cannot be done unless we see ourselves as a people, as a nation. When I say African nationalism, I am also using the term to embrace the global African world—African-America, African-Caribbean, and so on. (p. 125-126)

The need for white acceptance and approval often overshadows the needs of the collective. The research presented previously on the low socio-economic standing of Afro-Latin@ immigrants residing in the United States proves that white ingratiation has not changed the status of millions

of African descendants. One of my goals of this study is to illustrate the cultural distinctions that exist amongst Africans of the diaspora, but also to declare that until we cease to relish in individuality and begin to unite as a collective, African descendants will forever be afflicted with fragmentation.

Negotiations of Love

Another negotiation that Afro-Latin@s have made is related to their romantic relationships. Whereas blanqueamiento (whitening) is a commonly accepted Latin American ethos, of course others select romantic partners based on a litany of precepts and reasons. My participants are no exception. They all described inter/outer marriages in their families and in their countries of origin as well as their negotiations of these practices.

Throughout the novel, *Geographies of Home*, Afro-Dominican author Pérez tackles the intricacies of racial experiences amongst Dominican immigrants. Through dating preferences she exposes the variant complexities of racial identity formation. Pérez includes a profound conversation between two sisters, Marina and Iliana on the subject of dating. During Iliana's home visit from her predominantly white college in New York, Marina inquires, "Have you hooked yourself a *gorgeous blue-eyed hunk* yet" (Pérez, 1999, p. 37)? To which Iliana responded, "Blue-eyed wouldn't be my first choice" (Pérez, 1999, p. 37). Marina then teased Iliana by stating that she was probably seeking "a big, black stud" (Pérez, 1999, p. 37). Annoyed, Iliana retorted, "A big-black-man-with-a-great-big-dick" (Pérez, 1999, p. 37). Marina responded that if Iliana chose to date a black man she would be dating beneath her standards when she could obviously do better. As the child of a white mother and black father in Puerto Rico, Cruz-Janzen (2001) knows first-hand how Latin@s view mixed unions. "While my father's family called me *trigueña*, signifying a "step up" from being black, my mother's called me *negra* (black) and *mulata*,

signifying a step down from being white” (p. 170). Given Cruz-Janzen’s observations, it is understandable, albeit misinformed, how an Afro-Latina is socialized to prefer whiteness.

Marina stated, “You know how black men are. They’re lazy as shit and undependable” (Pérez, 1999, p. 37). Marina bolsters her observation of black men’s inadequacies by using her very own Afro-Dominican male siblings as proof of black men’s inferiority. Iliana responded, “What are you saying? That blacks are inferior. Is that what you think about yourself” (Pérez, 1999, p. 37)? Marina retorted, “**I’m Hispanic, not black.**” Iliana interrogated, “What color is your skin?” To which Marina answered emphatically, “**I’m Hispanic**” (Pérez, 1999, p. 37).

One of the purposes of *mestizaje*, defined as race mixing, and *mejorando la raza* (bettering the race) is the adherence to the hierarchy that white is more attractive and better, although another purpose is social mobility. Hunt (2007) noted that Latin@s embrace an “ethnoracial status as a means of assimilation and upward mobility” (p. 393-394). Therefore, not only are beauty standards a factor in the repression of black identity amongst Latin@s, but economic stability and social mobility are also powerful incentives for assimilation. An Afro-Dominican colleague from La Romana acknowledged that even as a child she recalled longing for affirmation from white boys.

We are products of our culture, and I needed white boys to validate me. I would think, wow if a white boy likes me then that is really something. Ever since I was a little girl, I wanted white boys to like me. This was the reality, but we all succumb to it. (personal communication, March 21, 2012)

Related to Bobby Vaughn’s (2005) report that some Latin American countries downplay or deny African presence and African heritage, Maritza Quiñones Rivera (2006) explained how *mestizaje* and *blanqueamiento* operate in Puerto Rico (although the phenomenon is not limited to Puerto Rico). Given the historical racial mixing prevalent amongst Europeans, Indigenous populations, and African descendants, some purport that these practices produced a “racially

homogenous Puerto Rico” (p. 163). Returning to Bonilla-Silva’s (2004) tri-racial hypothesis, he concluded that within the United States “Racial assimilation through marriage (whitening) is significantly more likely for children of Asian-white and Latino-white unions than for those of black-white unions” given that Asians and white Latin@s have the privilege of assimilating as Honorary whites (p. 940). Paul Kivel (1996) explained why certain types of interracial unions result in greater privileges of assimilation than others.

According to Kivel (1996), “In the United States a person is considered a member of the lowest status group from which they have any heritage” (as quoted in Johnson, 2006, p. 33). As Johnson (2006) explained, if you are multiracial or multicultural, you are most likely to be identified by the marker that is least esteemed as in *He’s part Jewish* or *She’s part Philipino*. We label in this manner with occupations as well such as *black doctor* or *female judge* but never *male congressman* or *white lawyer*. White become the default category for all things esteemed.

Although Bonilla-Silva (2004) found that Latin@s who “are generally more dark-skinned...have restricted chances for outmarriage to whites in a highly racialized marriage market” (p. 940) the participants of this study varied in their partner preferences. Dominican María, who is very fair skinned, is married to a brown-skinned Afro-Cuban man of pronounced African heritage. Dominican Blanca, who can pass for white, is married to a fair-skinned Cuban man. Afro-Panamanians Iris and Azucena are both married to darker skinned black-Antilleans of Jamaican descent. Afro-Panamanian Jelly is married to an African-American man. Although Afro-Guatemalan Eufemia is now widowed, her husband was a Garífuna man of African ancestry. Finally, both Julia (Dominican) and Elisa (Guatemalan) are single and have never been married.

The participants were open concerning their negotiations of love. Although it is commonly accepted that Dominicans have a romantic preference for light or white partners,

María and Julia presented a different analysis of this standard that deviated somewhat from commonly held notions of Dominican dating preferences. According to Julia and María, Dominicans are not as preoccupied with light or white partners as believed; to the contrary, they surmise that what truly interests Dominicans is the conflation of colors. In other words, Dominicans esteem exotic mixtures and prefer to date partners who will contrast their own racial phenotype. María explained the Dominican preference for the “combinado de dos colores” *combination of two colors*. For example, since Julia is brown skinned, she prefers a light or white skinned partner so that their offspring will be a nice mix of the two. Similarly, since María is quite fair skinned, she prefers a darker skinned partner for the same reason. They contend that they neither esteem whiteness nor blackness in their partner selections, they more so esteem the amalgam of complexions which they feel will offset their own and hence produce more beautiful offspring. To this end, Julia explained,

Más por eso lo hace para que los niños salgan como más bonitos. Con un colorcito más... Para refinar la familia. Y es que siempre un blanquito que quiere con moreno porque combina malo colores. Entonces mira [María] bonita, solo un hombre moreno. Entonces a mí me gustan mis hombres blancos, aunque hay morenos preciosos. Para tener mis hijos para casarme me gustaría, pero si encuentro un buen hombre moreno también, pero...tú entiendes, yo prefiero un hombre blanco.

They do it more so that the children will come out prettier. With a color that is more...To refine the family. And a white always wants a black person because two of the same color is bad. So look at pretty María, she can only be with a black man. So for me I like my white men, although there are some precious black men. To have my children and to marry I would like a white man, but if I find a good black man too, but...you understand, I prefer a white man.

It is apparent that Julia esteems the *beauty of amalgamation*. She and María expressed the belief that biracial children are more beautiful than the offspring of two blacks or two whites. Julia also interjected an interesting supposition that supports the notion of *mejorando la raza* (*bettering the*

race). Being a very brown woman, Julia explained that marrying a white man and having mixed children would “refinar la familia.” With this statement Julia reveals that whitening the race will bring purity and refinement to her family line. Julia expressed excitement at the possibility of meeting a white American man with whom to marry. She went on to explain that this mentality is not something of the past, but is alive and thriving in contemporary Dominican culture.

Julia affirmed, “Y esa mentalidad no ha cambiado tras las generaciones.” *And this mentality has not changed for generations.* Julia also explained that their mentality was not relegated to women, but also commonly shared amongst Dominican men.

Y los hombres también. Les encantan sus mujeres blancas. No les gustan mujeres de su color, ni más morenas. Entonces si puede ser blanca rubia de nacimiento que es mucho mejor. Aunque es tontería, me entiendes, es así.

And the men too. They love their white women. They like women neither of María’s color nor darker. So if you can be white and blond from birth it is much better. Although it is ridiculous, you feel me, that’s the way it is.

According to Julia and María, although María is very fair skinned, she is still *not white enough*. For example, although her hair is blown out to look silky smooth and straight, it is not her natural texture. Similarly, although her hair is colored blonde, she is not a natural blonde. Although these modifications may elevate María’s status above darker skinned Dominican women, in the eyes of many Dominican men she is still not comparable to a white woman.

Like the Dominican Republic, Azucena shared that mixed unions are also common in Panama. A distinction in Panama is that interracial dating often crosses racial lines to include various Panamanian ethnic subcultures. Azucena explained,

In Panama there was a lot of interracial dating. I met a lot of people. There was Chinese married to black and they still was (sic) kind of my complexion but you always know Chinese is in there because you see the full eyes. Well I kind of date[d] a Latino, white, what you call white but it’s just not something that I was very interested in, I never did. But I think that there was (sic) a lot of interracial relationships in Panama.

Although Azucena was surrounded by interracial unions she preferred to date black men. When asked *why*, she simply stated that she had tried interracial dating but did not prefer it for her personally. Iris explained that in Hispanic Panamanian culture, interracial dating is widely accepted, however, to the contrary in her case the issue was not one of race since she married a black man who was quite similar in appearance to her, but the issue was the variance of cultures. Her family rejected his Jamaican ancestry and African influenced ways. Although black in appearance, Iris' family was "muy hispana" and adopted the ways of Spain, viewing the Afro-Antillean as inferior. Of her youthful Afro-Antillean suitor, Iris reported,

Yo pensé que él iba a visitarme, O no, él le dijo a mi mamá que él quería casarse conmigo. Mi mamá estaba tan furiosa. Y yo no había terminado el secundario y ella dice, ella tiene que terminar la escuela, le dice. Él dice, está bien, yo espero. Lo trataron bien, él se fue. Mi hermana fue horrible. Sí, esta tensión, sí es. Amigos bien, perfecto, si a formar parte de la familia, otra cosa. Eso es el tipo de fricción.

I thought he was going to visit me, oh no, he told my mother that he wanted to marry me. My mother was furious. And I had not finished high school and she says, she has to finish school, she told him. He says, that's fine, I'll wait. They treated him well and he left. My sister was horrible. Yes, this tension, it is there. As friends, fine, perfect, but to become part of the family is another story. This is the type of friction that exists.

When I asked Azucena about the tension between Afro-Antilleans and Afro-Hispanics, she had had no such experience. She felt the two groups got along well. The unity and lack of tension with which Azucena viewed the inter-cultural relationships may be in part due to the fact that she too is an Afro-Antillean woman who married an Afro-Antillean man. Contrariwise, Iris' family was native to Panama, for this reason she and her husband's cultures differed. Iris explained that she had to be apprenticed by her new husband's family in order to learn how to cook their foods and to understand their customs. It seems that the convergence of two distinct cultures coupled with a troubled history between the two groups fueled the tension. Guatemalan participants also shared stories of tension resulting from interracial unions.

The Guatemalan participants reported the prevalence of interracial unions in Guatemala; however, unlike in Panama and the Dominican, Elisa explained that these unions were met with opposition at times. She stated, “Hay un rechazo” (there is rejection). Her mother, Eufemia, agreed that some people of her community, mostly whites, resist interracial unions; however, she felt it was impossible to place limits on love. Although Elisa and Eufemia agreed on the community’s rejection of interracial unions, they disagreed on the role of women in Guatemalan society.

Negotiations of Gender: ‘Women are now in all spheres.’

Gender Norms and Patriarchal Politics

Excerpt from Kinsey Report #2 by Rosario Castellanos

Y un día vendrá el Príncipe Azul,
porque se lo he rogado
como un milagro a San Antonio. Entonces
vamos a ser felices. Enamorados siempre.
¿Qué importa la pobreza? Y si es borracho

lo quitaré del vicio. Si es un mujeriego

yo voy a mantenerme siempre tan atractiva,
tan atenta a sus gustos, tan buena ama de casa.

Tan prolífica madre
y tan extraordinaria cocinera
que se volverá fiel como premio a mis méritos

entre los que, el mayor, es la paciencia.

One day my Prince Charming will come,
because I have prayed for him
as a miracle to Saint Anthony. Then
we are going to be happy. Always in love.
What does it matter if we’re poor? And if
he’s a drunk

I’ll take away his bad habit. If he is a
womanizer

I’m going to keep myself so attractive,
So attentive to his likes, such a good
housewife.

Such a fertile mother
and such an extraordinary cook
that he will become faithful as a prize of my
merits

Among the greatest of them is patience.

The Castellanos excerpt reveals a traditional view of marriage where the passive, self-sacrificing woman becomes an intermediary for her womanizing male partner. The female narrator values her role as wife, mother, and cook. In all his waywardness, it is the wife who assumes the responsibility for liberating him from his vices. This poem reveals that while it is accepted in society that boys will be naughty boys, it is equally accepted that girls are nurturers.

In her novel, *Geographies of Home*, Afro-Dominican author Perez troubles these traditional standards of marriage and gender roles.

Pérez often cites the misogynistic doctrines of religion, in this family's case the Seventh Day Adventist church. Pérez situates the church as one of the foundations of machismo and sexism. The father of the family, Papito, is a devout Adventist who raised his children with the strictest Adventist doctrines. Iliana, Papito's daughter, buffers the sexist teachings of the Adventist church. Pérez cleverly includes sermons to show the role that the church has played in creating gender disparities. In one such instance, although Iliana is questioning her faith, out of respect for her father, she attends a service in which the pastor preaches on *The Virtues of Marriage*. Some of his most distressing statements follow.

Can the sanctity of marriage be upheld when men are so mercilessly tricked by women? Can you imagine? Rolls of flesh giggle on her belly, so that her husband suddenly realizes she'd used a girdle to cinch her waist. Ah! The vanity of women. It's been so since the time of Eve. That's why so many marriages fail. (Pérez, 1999, p. 106)

Congregant Iliana refuted, "Why the fuck doesn't he criticize men for falling in love with hair, lips and perky tits? And what place did this tirade have in church? What did any of it have to do with God" (Pérez, 1999, p. 106)? Iliana was tired of a system that constantly relinquished the man of his responsibilities while demonizing the woman. This conversation can be extended to explain why Iliana's sister Rebecca blamed herself for two failed marriages, even though she had been a virgin until marriage and followed the traditionally virtuous role laid out for Latin American women. The participants of my study readily pointed out gender inequities in Latin America. They also offered comparisons of gender roles between their countries and the United States.

The Woman's Role: "She has to do everything for the man."

None of my participants disdained housework. To the contrary they all seemed to gleam satisfaction, comfort, and even joy over keeping their homes nicely and performing domestic chores such as cooking. The issue was not with housework, the issue was disequilibrium. Some participants lamented the imbalanced way that duties were apportioned; this disproportionate allocation stifled women's progress and their ability to find success outside of the home. "Women have sought to matter in the social contexts they inhabit—some through and within traditional roles and others despite them" (Villaverde, 2008, p. 17).

Dominicans María and Julia's interspersed dialogue reveals the incongruence of traditional gender roles in the Dominican. It was obvious that both women felt strong emotions towards the machismo and sexism that they had witnessed. They acknowledged in their narratives that although there are some men who help their women, by far they are not the majority. When asked to detail the gender roles of men and women, María and Julia offered the following.

María: Bueno en mi país, lamentablemente la mujer está hecha para aguantar, para trabajar, para limpiar, para cocinar. **Tiene que hacerle todo al hombre.** No todos porque hay algunos que ayudan a la mujer, pero la mujer en mi país es muy sumisa a la relación del hombre. Que es el hombre que toma la última palabra.

Well in my country, unfortunately the woman is made to tolerate, to work, to clean, to cook. **She has to do everything for the man.** Not all men, because there are some that help the woman, but the woman in my country is very submissive within the relationship with the man. It is the man who has the last word.

Julia: No sale si él no le dice. Que no se junta con amigas si él no lo dice. (*She does not go out if he does not tell her. She does not hang out with friends if he does not say so.*)

María: Él es el que tiene que decir. Tiene que ser lista y presta para atenderlo a él porque él es hombre. (*He is the one who has to say so. She has to be ready and willing to tend to him because he is the man.*)

Julia: A cocinar, a planchar, a esperarlo en su casa. (*Ready to cook, iron and to wait on him at home.*)

María and Julia disclosed stories of domesticity where the woman is relegated to the confines of the home, with little to no protest on her part. Like the man, many Dominican women have accepted the hand dealt by a patriarchal society. According to these respondents, the Dominican man also places restrictions on women's movements. These gender limitations have afforded women less access to institutions such as education, the workforce, and social networks of mobility.

When women come to reject these traditional roles, they are often accused of being unfeminine, rupturing the family, and castrating the man. Although speaking of a U.S. context, upon refusing to acquiesce to traditional values, black feminist Michelle Wallace (1995) noted the following consequences,

...I was told of the awful ways in which black women, me included, had tried to destroy the black man's masculinity; how we had castrated him; worked when he didn't work; made money when he made none; spent our nights and days in church praying ...while he collapsed into alcoholism, drug addiction, and various forms of despair; how we'd always been too loud and domineering, too outspoken. (p. 221)

Unlike Wallace, the Dominican and Guatemalan participants did not report observing many women who deviated from the patriarchal norm. However, the Panamanian participants seemed to be more modernized in their negotiations of gender roles. Although Dominican participant Blanca would agree that there are men in the Dominican who are quite *machista*, she relayed that in her family the men treated the women very well and the women all married kind men. Blanca explained that the way men interact with women "depende del nivel de educación" (depends on one's level of education). It is important here to note that in Spanish, *educación* is not a true cognate. Although it does refer to schooling and intellectualism, *educación* also refers to one's degree of sophistication and exposure to social and cultural codes of conduct. Blanca explained that her father treated her mother like a queen. Blanca supported this statement by

explaining, “Mi papá nunca dejó trabajar a mi mamá. Ella siempre era una reina. Él no quería que nosotros [sus hijas] trabajáramos.” *My father never allowed my mother to work. She was always a queen. He did not want us [his daughters] to work either.* Whereas María and Julia gave similar descriptions of Dominican men not electing that their wives and daughters work, they viewed this mentality as a shackle. On the other hand, Blanca felt her father had set an excellent example as a breadwinner and thereby had taught his daughters what to expect from the men in their lives.

Mercedes Pedrero-Nieto (2013) studied *time use* as it relates to gender inequalities in selected Latin American countries: Mexico, Peru, and Ecuador. Pedrero-Nieto (2013) found that gender differences are cultivated throughout the lifespan of a young Latina girl. “[T]here is a cultural pattern that is unfavorable to women. Therefore, the struggle for equality has to be extended to all levels, starting at their own home” (Pedrero-Nieto, 2013, p. 57). During her youth a Latina girl is often given more domestic, in-home tasks than her male sibling, a double standard that perpetuates gender inequities. According to Criado & Reyes (2005) “Las mujeres desde su nacimiento son forzadas a un aprendizaje social para asumir las actividades propias del trabajo reproductivo, sin recibir por ello ningún reconocimiento económico y social” (p. 39). *From birth Latina women are forced into a social education to assume reproductive activities, without receiving any economic or social recognition.* Not surprisingly these data reveal that women in Latin America tend to work in the home and have less access to remunerative opportunities. Pedrero-Nieto (2013) found, “The majority of women spend much of their time doing non-remunerated domestic work, which limits their access to other opportunities since time is finite” (p. 57). Also, women often perform tasks that require more frequency such as daily cooking or daily caregiving to children or elderly relatives, whereas men may have tasks that are more spaced out, such as lawn care or fixing something when it breaks. The frequency of the tasks equate to less free time for girls and women and more leisure time for boys and men, leading to

an imbalanced quality of life. “More free time means more autonomy, more recreation and in some cases greater opportunities for personal enrichment and the strengthening of social networks” (Pedrero-Nieto, 2013, p. 58). The Guatemalan participants reported similar gender inequities; however, they disagreed on the value of these experiences. In speaking on the roles of women, the Guatemalan participants feel compelled to speak of the Garífuna woman, which is representative of their lived, first-hand experience. Below Eufemia described the Garífuna family past and present.

El papel de la mujer Garífuna en aquellos entonces el hombre era el que tenía que salir para conseguir el pan diario para la casa. La mujer era la que tenía que estar cuidando a los hijos. No salía a trabajar. Y ahora con la era moderna, el hombre por otro lado, la mujer por otro lado, y los hijos por otro lado también (Field note: Ella se ríe). Así es ahora.

The role of the Garífuna woman back then, well the man was the one who had to leave to get food for the house. The woman was the one who would be taking care of the children. She did not work. And now in this modern era, the man goes his way, the woman goes her way, and the children go another way. (Field note: Eufemia laughs) That’s how it is now.

Eighty-year old Eufemia felt the days of old were better, not only for women but also for the entire family. She believed that traditional roles enabled the father to earn a living while the mother supported the home and could provide guidance to her children. Eufemia felt the lack of productivity of Garífuna youth could be traced, in part, to the dismantling of the traditional family structure and adherence to their respective gender roles. Her younger daughter, Elisa, who is 53 years old begged to differ.

Elisa felt that modern times caused for a renegotiation of traditional values as well as more collaborative thinking. Elisa appreciated the balance of responsibilities that she observed in relationships in the United States. She viewed the roles of women and men far more pragmatically.

Si el padre no puede sostener el hogar, tiene que la esposa ayudarlo para llevar adelante la familia. (Pregunta de Krishauna: ¿Y los hijos?) Bueno...yo diría que los padres pueden trabajar torneándose, para que cada uno se quede con los hijos durante que la otra pareja está trabajando. Se pueden tornear. **Yo no estoy de acuerdo de que la mujer se quede en casa.**

If the father cannot sustain the home, the wife has to work to help him to move the family ahead. (Researcher's follow-up question: And what about the children?) Well...I would say that the parents can work in shifts, so that each one can stay with the children while the other one is working. They can take turns. **I don't agree that the woman should stay home.**

Elisa does not hesitate to offer a counter perspective. She consistently uses language implying collaboration and partnership such as *helping one another, working in shifts, and turn taking*. The Panamanian participants' response to gender roles appeared to be more westernized. They did not understand the concept of women remaining in the home. Since they were of a higher economic and academic class than other participants, their communities were full of professional women who had often attended university and who held careers. Iris, Jelly, and Azucena told stories of progressive Panamanian women. They themselves are testaments of progress given that it was they who secured U.S. teaching positions and brought their families to the United States. Iris reported,

La mujer panameña... se parece mucho, culturalmente, intelectualmente hablando a la mujer americana. De la forma que se educa, siempre está, es progresista. Aunque la familia es importante el progreso cuenta. Estudiar cuenta para nosotros. Y es como sociedad se acepta. Mientras en otros países hispanos no, el hombre va a estudiar y la mujer se queda en la casa.

The Panamanian woman...resembles the American woman very much, culturally, intellectually speaking. In the way that she is educated, she is always there, she is progressive. Although the family is important, progress counts. Studying counts for us. And it is accepted by society. While in other Hispanic countries no, the man furthers his education and the woman remains in the home.

Iris added that today, Afro-Panamanian women can be found in all sectors. She stated, “Hay afro-hispanas en puestos altos en Panama por ejemplo tenemos Sonia Dixon, es una de las magistradas de la corte suprema. Y otras hay muchas abogadas, médicas, en todas las ramas.” There are Afro-Hispanic women in very high positions in Panama, for example we have Sonia Dixon, she is a magistrate of the Supreme Court. ***And there are many other lawyers, doctors, in all spheres.*** Azucena agreed that Panamanian women are progressive women, but she made a distinction between black and white Panamanian women. Azucena felt that white (native) Panamanians were more likely to follow traditional gender roles and remain in the home while black Panamanian women, similar to African-American women, are accustomed to working and making their own way. Azucena remarked,

Black women most of them always trying to find the work or they’re selling something or they’re doing something because men in Panama sometimes they say that they have more women to men. I would say like a 20% who stay home because their husband can provide for them. But even though you have women that their husbands have very good jobs, but they still wanna (sic) work. So they would pay for people to stay with the kids. Or they would take them to their grandparents or things like that. But I think women in Panama are very hardworking women. I don’t find that a lot of them would just stay home and just don’t do anything.

Azucena clarified that it simply is not the tradition of the black woman to remain in the home. Even if she has the means to do so, she typically works or has her own merchant business. In a U.S. context, like Elisa, Eufemia, and Azucena, bell hooks (1984) also made a racial distinction. Hooks (1984) discussed the concept of women’s work and U.S. mainstream second wave feminists who touted the mantra: *work is liberation*. Hooks (1984) wrote,

Middle class women shaping feminist thought assumed that the most pressing problem for women was the need to get outside the home and work... They were so blinded by their own experiences that they ignored the fact that a vast majority of women were (even at the time the *Feminine Mystique* was published) already working outside the home, working in jobs that neither liberated them from men nor made them economically self-sufficient. Early feminist perpetuation of the notion “work liberates women” alienated

many poor and working class women, especially non-white women from feminist movement...(p. 96-97).

Whereas many women of color were already economically forced into the workplace, the women's movement propelled certain segments of white women into the workforce who had not formerly occupied such positions. As these women ascended some came to outrank their African-American counterparts. In such cases many of these women took on the leadership standards and customs of their white male counterparts, thereby causing even more alienation of women of color (hooks, 1984). In analyzing U.S. women's work ethics, both Azucena and Jelly offered critiques. Azucena noted the following distinctions of U.S. American women.

A lot of women here [in the United States] are very, some are addicted to their work. I can't give you a percentage but I think that professional women sometimes they prefer not to have kids because they think that they just wanna (sic) be in their work. And if they have kids they have them very late.

Jelly had similar observations. Contrary to popular beliefs about Latina vs. U.S. women's progress, Jelly felt that Panamanian women were more self-reliant than U.S. women. Instead of seeing their romantic relationships as a partnership, Jelly felt U.S. women expected too much of their men. Unlike her mother, Azucena, who surmised that U.S. women were addicted to their jobs, Jelly concluded that U.S. women were far more content to let the man *do it all* meaning that he is the sole provider. On the other hand Jelly felt that U.S. women were overly content with being what she viewed as *maids*. Jelly stated, "If you have to stay at home only cooking, cleaning, and watching the kids and *not providing anything* then that's pretty much a maid. So, I've seen that a lot here [in the United States]." I found it interesting that Julia gave a similar description of women's domestic duties in the Dominican such as cooking, cleaning, ironing etc.; however, she equated it to a heavy workload. Although Jelly named similar domestic tasks amongst U.S. women, she categorized the women who performed them as "not providing

anything.” It appears that Jelly erroneously views working outside of the home as *real work*. Depending on their experiences with gender traditions in their native countries, upon arrival to the United States the women of my study made different negotiations with respect to gender roles.

Shifting Gender Roles

Now as U.S. residents, the participants were active in the workforce and drew some fulfillment from their work. As previously stated, the participants saw working and earning a living as a necessity to either sustain their families abroad or to provide a better life for themselves in the event that they chose to return to their native countries. In essence, their jobs were not solely for their benefit, but rather for that of the entire family unit. Some participants were eager to send money back home in order to afford their international relatives a more comfortable life than they had experienced themselves. Having been blessed with greater access to capital, participants never wavered in their commitment to support their families abroad.

As the participants became more active in the U.S. workforce, often with the purpose of communal responsibility, they seemed to distance themselves from traditional gender roles. For example, although perpetual spinsterhood would be seen as unnatural in most Latin American countries, Guatemalan Elisa never married during her 30 years in the United States and rarely dated. She worked and maintained her home with no partner support. Although María was married, at the time of this study she was separated from her husband and seemed to be a self-sufficient business owner even in his absence. The Dominican participants all worked in María’s salon garnering and sustaining their own livelihood. Clearly María felt it her responsibility to employ her family members and to give them an easier start than had been afforded her upon arrival to the United States. Towards the end of this study, María had invited two more female cousins from Florida to reside with her and to work in her salon until they got on their feet. Since

the world of hairstylists is female dominated, it stands to reason that I only saw María employing and aiding female members of her family; however, given the difficulties that María suffered while immigrating as a young woman, she took a special interest in assisting her female relatives to ensure that they would never have to suffer as she did.

Dominican Blanca viewed her marriage as a partnership. In my observation of the salon I observed her husband spend the entire day with her. He lovingly assisted her with several tasks such as bringing her beauty and hair care supplies when needed, cashing out the customers, and running errands such as fetching Blanca's reading glasses and going out to purchase her lunch. Blanca explained that her husband works very hard and only has one day off during the week which is on Mondays. Since she chooses to work at the salon on Mondays, he accompanies her from their home, which is over 30 miles away from the salon, so that they can spend time together. Each time that I have been in their presence their marriage always stands out to me as a marriage of equal partners.

The Panamanian women work in professional capacities as either educators or in the medical field. They have careers alongside of their husbands and appear to be collectively building their lives together. For example, Jelly explained her ideal relationship as follows. "When people are in a relationship it is 50/50 not like 25/25, the same here in my marriage. You will do what I do and I will do what you do. It's not that you do more or that I do more. It's like 50/50." Whatever the participants may have witnessed in their countries abroad or in the United States with respect to gender politics, some positive and some negative, my participants have distanced themselves from traditional constraints and have negotiated equitable partnerships both romantically and economically in their host country.

Negotiations of Beauty: ‘*Pretty is having long straight hair.*’

As previously demonstrated in the literature review, many women of color must confront dominant beauty standards. The beauty paradigms tend to disproportionately affect women and hence are a gendered phenomenon. Several participants of this study described dominant beauty paradigms in their countries of origin and also in the United States. Afro-Panamanian Azucena explained that there is a very distinct image for beauty in Panama. Azucena expressed that in contemporary Panamanian culture there is a preference for whiteness. She stated,

You find more the tendency [to take] more beautiful women from the interior [of Panama] because they have maybe blue eyes or they’re light skinned because that’s what they want their business to look [like]. And if you want to see the people that they gonna (sic) take to make like the magazine or the picture for the different publicity it is always predominantly gonna (sic) be white.

According to Azucena, not only are whites preferred in business but they are also preferred in pop culture such as movies and magazines. Azucena explained that for blacks to transcend white beauty standards they must be exceptional in some way. She gave examples of Panamanian beauty queens. To win these pageants the white girl must be pretty, but the black girl must be exceptionally beautiful. In addition she must possess something extra such as an outstanding education or a unique skill set. Similarly, Guatemalan Elisa also enumerated certain racialized beauty standards typical of her country. In the quote below, Elisa explained how blacks were historically excluded from Guatemalan beauty pageants.

Antes no incluía la gente *morena*. Pero ahora incluyen la gente, *la trigueña*. Los *trigueños* son *mixtados*. Y la gente *morena* son *negritos* como yo. Los *mulatos* son mixed, entonces su pelo también es distinto.

Before they did not include *blacks*. But now they include *la trigueña*. *Los trigueños* are mixed. And the *moreno* are black like I am. The *mulatos* are mixed, and their hair is also distinct.

Elisa's quote reveals that although *trigueñas* are now included in Guatemalan pageants, they too must be exotic or mixed race with favorable hair textures.

As a cross-cultural comparison, Julia explained that she fared far worse in the Dominican Republic because of her dark complexion than in Spain. She was actually relieved to reach Spain where, for the first time, she was viewed as beautiful and her African features were highly esteemed and exoticized. Julia stated,

Y mi color le llamó mucha la atención. Que lo que no les gustaba en mi país les gustaba allá. Allá en mi país no era bien vista entonces pues [los españoles] encuentran el color de nosotros bellísimo y el pelo, el pelo todos tocan a cada rato.

And my color received a lot of attention. What they did not like in my country they liked it there. There in my country I was not viewed well but [Spaniards] find our color beautiful and our hair, they all want to touch it at every instance.

The line between exaltation and exoticism can be a difficult demarcation to draw. In Spain, was Julia more esteemed based on the exoticism of her features than a genuine affirmation of her beauty, or perhaps a combination of both schools of thought? Both scholars and lay(wo)men have pointed out the animalistic behavior, such as unwelcomed petting and touching and even diminutive language such as 'You're a cute little thing,' that can accompany being placed in exoticized or *other* categories. Although such accolades are appreciated when offered in balance, they may be met with disdain when offered to the extreme or when lacking tactfulness. Nonetheless, the attention was welcomed by Julia. It offered her a burst of self-confidence that she had not known in the country of her birth. Although she had worked in the beauty industry most of her life, her features were not deemed as beautiful until she stepped off of Dominican soil.

Understanding the negotiations that must operate in the job market, many Afro-Panamanian women reported opting for straight processed hair in order to compete with their

white Hispanic counterparts. When asked why most Panamanian women opt to straighten their hair, Azucena responded,

Well as I told you I think it's something about the beauty and aesthetics. They feel that if their hair is straight it makes them look more you know maybe high skilled or more professional, for different situations... you have so many Hispanics and competition of the Hispanic that has the long, blonde, maybe dye with peroxide but they're blonde (laughs). Same as you would find them here but then they have this **long hair & they keep it straight and pretty** and I feel that they feel that if they have it natural it's not something that for them is enticing.

Simmons (2009) also concluded, "Social pressures are strong in the African-American community—especially among those in the middle class—for a particular hairstyle" (p. 2).

Although I concur with Simmons (2009), I would add that the *pressure* within the African-American community for straight hair is often a microcosmic response to dominant standards of beauty which, when adhered to, frequently propel social mobility. Although wearing her hair flat ironed and straight was the norm until her college years, Simmons (2009) began to reflect on the socialization process that often accompanies these decisions. She wrote, "I started wearing it curly and *I as* (sic) [**as I**] began my own process of reflection, thinking about the politics of hair in the African-American community, I made a conscious decision to wear my hair that way, in a "natural" state. Even within her own community, Simmons (2009) challenged dominant ideologies of beauty.

Observations at Dominican Hair Salon & Revelations of Beauty Politics

I observed at the Dominican hair salon on three occasions. Twice was during the week and once on a Saturday. My observations totaled about six hours. There is something dynamic that occurs in a salon or barber shop setting that welcomes openness. While there, I overheard and engaged in a litany of conversations that related to my research questions from both patrons and research participants. The unobstructed conversations flowed effortlessly out of the women's

mouths and into my ears like the warmth of the blow dryer's breeze. I found myself sitting in the salon and smiling at the joviality that the setting provided. Although the women spoke in an unrestrained manner, much of what they said was profound in terms of negotiations of beauty.

At times my role in the salon was ambiguous, but other times it would be exposed because the patrons would observe me seated in the salon. Since they knew that I had arrived ahead of them, respectfully not wanting to jump in front of me, they consistently asked me was I waiting to be served. Most of the time a stylist would jump in to say, "No, she is not waiting to be served." However, at times when the stylists were busy I would often be left to explain why the patron could go ahead of me, or in essence to explain my presence. In those instances I would acknowledge that I was not waiting to be served, and reveal that I was there working on a *dissertation, an article, or a school project*. It was during these moments that I was able to enjoy follow-up conversations with patrons who wanted to know more about my work.

"Being in outsider-within locations can foster new angles of vision on oppression" (Hill Collins, 2009). Since I have natural hair that has not been chemically straightened in over 10 years and only flat ironed twice in 10 years, I rarely step foot into a hair salon. I prefer to wear my hair up or in its naturally curly state. I grew tired of stylists petitioning me to straighten my hair, which is where the income lies for them, but where the damage lies for me. For this reason I came to boycott salons and prefer to style and to care for my own hair. Since salon culture is not a part of my recent history, the observations proved eye-opening and highly informative.

During my observations I noted dozens of women being serviced at the salon; however, true to my participants' disclosure, they were all African-American women. I was surprised that although my participants shared that their clientele was almost 100% black, every picture posted in the salon was either of white women or women of color who exhibited white dominant beauty features. I noted eight posters that hung in the salon. Of the eight posters, six were of white

women with straight hair. One was of an Asian woman who was wearing a blonde wig, and the other was of a black woman who was wearing a straight hair wig. I also noted that on the door there was a sign advertising the salon's services. Although the advertisement referenced natural hair (hair that is not chemically straightened) most of the services that were offered such as the relaxer, keratin treatment, and the infamous Dominican blowout would in fact alter the texture of curly to kinky hair by leaving it straightened.



Figure 10. Dominican Salon Decor

Ironically, when I entered each salon for this project enjoying the freedom of my curly hair, the stylists all welcomed the opportunity to straighten it and told me how straight and long my hair would be if I allowed them to give me a blowout or flat iron. I politely declined. It was clear that the Dominican stylists privileged straight hair or at least recognized that there was a monetary profit to be made with altering the texture of one's hair. With respect to beauty politics, Candelario (2000) conducted a six-month study at a Dominican hair salon in New York City. Her research revealed "a central aspect of Dominican hair culture has been the twin notions of pelo malo (bad hair) and pelo bueno (good hair)" (p. 137). Dominican stylist Julia explained the distinction between pelo malo and pelo bueno in her native country.

Por ejemplo yo tengo el pelo rizo y lo desrizan allá que es el pelo malo allá en mi país, el pelo mío, entonces. Pelo bueno allá en mi país es como lo chino. (Krishauna dice: Si el pelo de Julia es pelo malo, ¿qué tengo yo? (nos reimos). Yo tengo el pelo así como tú por ejemplo, lo que pasa es que yo lo tengo lizado ahora con el blowout.

For example, I have curly hair which is bad hair in my country and they straighten it there [in the Dominican]. Good hair there in my country is like the Chinese. Krishauna interjects, “If Julia’s hair is bad hair then what do I have?” (Field Note: We all laugh). Julia continues, I have hair just like you for example, what happens is that I have it straightened now with the blowout.

Since I had never received a blowout, I observed the process for the first time while conducting field observations at the salon. Of the dozens of patrons that I witnessed being serviced, 100% received a blowout although some also added other services such as haircuts, coloring, and deep conditioning treatments. By far, the blowout was the hottest ticket in town amongst African-American women. On a Saturday the salon is so overrun with patrons that one would struggle to find a seat. Although patrons were quite relaxed with their time and did not mind waiting, the stylists had their routine down to a science. They had a “shampoo girl” as she was called who did all the washing. Another young woman did all the roller sets. Then there were specific stylists who did the blowouts. The salon was well organized and well structured. Several patrons commented to me how much they appreciated the salon’s service and professionalism.

Throughout the United States the Dominican hair salons have become a place of welcomed convergence between African-Americans and Dominicans. This connection is largely due to the highly coveted *Dominican blowout* hairstyle which straightens afro, kinky, and curly hair while using heat instead of chemicals such as relaxers. Noting the distinctions in hair textures, Julia explained that although she had been famous in the Dominican for her blowouts, she was not prepared for the distinct skill needed to straighten African-American hair. She found that African-Americans’ hair tends to be more course than Dominicans; therefore, she had to be apprenticed by María upon arriving in the United States before she was able to style African-American hair textures.

For the Dominican Blowout, the straightening process is achieved by first setting the hair in large rollers to stretch and straighten the hair after a fresh shampoo and condition. The roller

set makes the subsequent blowout more manageable. The client is then placed under a hooded dryer to allow the hair to dry. The next step of the blowout process is that the stylists use powerful amounts of heat from specialized blow dryers to straighten small sections of the hair until the entire head is completed. After blow-drying the hair section by section the hair is then flat ironed on a high heat setting to further straighten the hair. The final step is that the flat ironed hair is then hot curled to the clients' desired style. I should mention that the Dominican blowout gets the afro, kinky, and curly textured hair types remarkably straightened; however, the heating processes are so extreme that patrons often wear ear covers and use towels to shield their faces and ears from the heat waves. I was curious to learn more about why the patrons are so enamored with having a straight head of hair.

In overhearing conversations between patrons in conjunction with direct conversations that I had with patrons, three themes surfaced that disclosed their preferences for straightened hair: Straight hair is healthier hair; Straight hair is more manageable hair; Straight hair is simply *my* choice. Patrons remarked that they felt the blowouts were a healthier way to achieve straight hair than a chemical relaxer. Since some felt the relaxers to be laced with harsh chemicals, they sought out a healthier alternative. They also explained that the Dominicans had mastered the art of straightening black hair in such a way that far exceeded even the craft of African-American stylists. Patrons consistently felt that the choice to forgo chemical treatments and to rely on heat was a safer option. Given the excessive heat that is used during the blowout, I was not convinced of the accuracy of this conclusion. I did hear the same case made by the stylists; for this reason I questioned if the patrons had received these insights from the salon.

Next, several patrons expressed that they found it unduly taxing to try to work with their afro-textured, kinky, or naturally curly hair. Most of them had tried to style and care for their hair while wearing it in its natural state but found it too troublesome. In the salon I overheard a

conversation of one group of African-American college-aged women discussing a friend who had decided to no longer straighten her hair. The patrons could not believe their friend was about to undertake what seemed to them to be the earth-shattering task of battling with kinky hair. One patron proclaimed to the other that she could never wrestle with her natural hair texture. For this reason, they found the blowouts to make the styling process more manageable. The blowouts will last until the hair is washed. After receiving several blowouts, the patrons reported their natural hair textures to now have looser curl patterns than before, a shift which eased their styling and haircare maintenance.

I found the last theme to be the most interesting. In our impromptu conversations I asked patrons if they felt their romantic partners preferred straight hair. Most clients reported affirmatively that they felt their particular partners and black men in general preferred straight hair to Afro-textured hair. When asked if they felt there was a push from society to have straight hair, such as their workplace, most patrons did not feel compelled to sport any particular hairstyle to work. Notwithstanding some commented that they found natural, afro, and kinky-curly hair to be less presentable than straight hair. Patrons also reported that in their families most of the women wore their hair straightened. I questioned if the preference from their romantic partners or families influenced their decisions to wear their hair straightened as opposed to their natural textures. All patrons with whom I spoke responded that the preferences of others had no bearing on their decisions to straighten their hair. In other words, although they were conscious that there is a prevalent standard for straight hair, they declared that they wore their hair in the straightened blowout simply because it was their choice. Interestingly, as I spoke with one African-American patron I noted that she continued to flip through internet photos on her smart phone. I observed that all of the women were white women with straight hair. I asked her if she were using the photos as a model for a future hairstyle. She responded that she wished to have her hair cut into

layers and was browsing photos to find the right cut. I found it interesting that similar to the posters displayed in the salon she too used white women as the model for her hair as opposed to African-American women.

In addition to the Dominicans, I also accompanied Panamanian, Iris, to a hair appointment where I was able to observe her hair salon experience as she had her hair chemically straightened by relaxer and then styled. The informality of the salon supported ease of conversation with both Iris and her Afro-Colombian hair stylist. The salon that Iris frequented is owned by an African-American woman who employed stylists from all backgrounds including Afro-Colombian, Korean, and African-American. The salon seemed to cater to a diverse clientele. I observed both black and white patrons who came to be serviced. They all had straight hair. The black patrons received relaxers, flat iron, or hair extensions while the white patron had her straight hair cut and colored. During our conversations at the salon, both Iris and her stylist questioned why anyone would want to *deal with* natural hair when it could be easily straightened to offer more versatility. I explained to them that I preferred my natural texture because I did not care for the chemicals in relaxers nor the heat that blowouts necessitated. The stylist spent time trying to convince me that the technique that she used to straighten hair was not as excessive in terms of heat as the Dominican method. Ensuing, Iris and her stylist held several conversations about famous black women's hair such as Michelle Obama, Oprah, and a local TV anchorwoman. Iris expressed great pride in Michelle Obama and Oprah's manicured hair while questioning why a local news anchor would not have done more to better straighten her hair. It was apparent that both the Afro-Colombian stylist and Iris highly regarded straightened hair as a sign of professionalism, beauty, and self-pride.

The salon observations, coupled with the interviews and dialogues, were eye-opening. The setting served as a space that bridged and connected two communities: African-American

women and Latina women. Socially, I believe the salon could serve as a space that celebrates similarities while bridging differences between the two groups. One salon patron remarked that ‘since hair texture and styling is something that both groups share in common, it makes us culturally similar.’

The Dominican stylists had traveled to the United States already carrying notions of *pelo malo* and *pelo bueno*. They were offering a long awaited service that African-American women welcomed. The women that I spoke with and observed chose to alter their natural hair textures in favor of straight hair. They understood the push from both society and their communities to wear their hair straightened; however, the majority did not feel they were in any way acquiescing to societal pressures. Additionally, none saw a need to resist these dominant standards, but rather reported feeling more comfortable, at ease, and presentable with straight hair. Of course, I fully believe that everyone has the right to wear their hair as they feel most comfortable; however, I question why neither the African-American patrons nor the Dominican stylists seemed to challenge dominant beauty standards, but rather seemed to support them.

In this study, only one out of eight participants wore her hair in its natural texture. Three wore blowouts with two of them coloring their hair blonde, two had relaxers, and two wore hair extensions or wigs. I found only two participants, Julia and Elisa, who acknowledged their acceptance of a dominant beauty paradigm.

Since I typically wear my hair in updos, Elisa was surprised the first time she saw my hair worn out in its naturally curly state which sparked a dialogue. After complimenting my curls, Elisa shared that she grew up wearing her hair naturally. Elisa questioned why she continued to wear hair extensions given that when she was in Guatemala she wore her hair naturally and it was the healthiest and longest it had ever been. She actually felt the altered states in which she now wore her hair (extensions and relaxers) in the United States were more damaging to her hair.

Following our conversation, Elisa wore her hair in its natural texture for a few weeks, but soon reverted back to wigs and extensions. During our interview, Julia also questioned her practice of constantly straightening her hair as well as society's demand for a certain look. Julia stated,

La verdad es que no sé. El pelo bonito es el pelo de nosotras. Si lo quiere lizo lo tiene lizo, si lo quiere rizo lo tiene rizo. Entonces en realidad el pelo lizo nada más se puede hacer una cosa, lizo solo. En mi país no piensan así. Están un poco (gesto de locura). En realidad en mi país, existe también racismo aunque uno no lo crea. He venido sabiéndolo ahora últimamente por comentarios y rechazo al color de uno y la verdad es que no me parece bien porque nosotros somos de raza morena, no somos de raza blanca entonces pues no sé, que todo eso está mal.

The truth is that I don't know. *Our* hair (including Krishauna's hair in her remark) is beautiful hair. If you want it straight you have it straight, and if you want it curly, you have it curly. So in reality with straight hair you can only do one thing, wear it straight. In my country they don't think like that. They are a little (gives gesture indicating *crazy*). In reality racism exists in my country although they do not believe it. I have come to know that now by their comments and rejection based on color, and the truth is that it's not right because we are all of the black race, we are not white, so I don't know, all of this is bad.

Julia truly wrestled with the dichotomy before her: how to reconcile her core belief that "our" hair is beautiful hair in its kinky-curly state, while simultaneously choosing not to wear it in its natural state. Julia does something that few participants and salon patrons did: she interrogated the source of her beliefs and the beauty politics rampant in her native country. Julia named a sole perpetrator: *racism*.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CLOSING THOUGHTS

Conclusions

Afro-Latina women begin to negotiate encounters of race, class, and gender early on in their countries of origin; the negotiations are expanded in their host country of the United States in order to accommodate U.S. paradigms. As a researcher I sought to answer two primary questions: 1) How does race impact the life stories and lived experiences of Afro-Latina women immigrants who were born in Latin America, but who now reside in the southern United States? and 2) How do Afro-Latina women immigrants negotiate the intersections of race, class, and gender in their everyday experiences. In narrative methodology and qualitative research we lean more to interpretive analysis than to presenting finite truths or answers. For this reason, the data analysis uncovered several interpretations that speak to my research questions.

Using the words of my participants, this study revealed five significant negotiations of race, class, and gender: Negotiations of Immigration and Class: “I did it for my family.”; Negotiations of Racism: “[T]here is a lot of racism here.”; Negotiations of Race and Identity: *Nationality First*: “I am not Mexican or African-American!”; Negotiations of Gender: ‘Women are now in all spheres.’; and Negotiations of Beauty: ‘*Pretty* is having long straight hair.’ Below I describe how this study yielded responses to the primary research questions.

How does race impact the life stories and lived experiences of Afro-Latina women immigrants who were born in Latin America, but who now reside in the southern United States?

One of the first questions that participants confronted revolved around their ambiguous racial and ethnic identities. Participants reported that their perceived race (black) was not

commonly associated with their ethnicity (Latina). For this reason it became necessary for my participants to educate or confront others regarding their intersecting identities. To this end, the participants were constantly read as Mexican or African-American. They rejected both categorizations. Six out of eight participants esteemed their national identity above race and preferred to be associated with their respective nationalities. Two of the six preferred to identify as both black and Panamanian while the remaining two Guatemalan participants seemed to separate themselves from their national identity and preferred the term black or Garífuna while residing in the United States. The Guatemalans came to this decision based on years of subjugation in their Latin American homeland.

This study revealed that Afro-Latin@s often come from nations that either downplay or deny their African heritage. All participants were victims of the hidden curriculum whereby African history is often relegated to the margins or not incorporated into the school curriculum at all. Through oral history narratives, some schooling, and traditions that survived in their families almost all participants had some knowledge of the history and contributions of their African heritage: some were more abreast than others. In the spirit of *sankofa*, most participants relied on their history and heritage to inform their present. It was heartening to see that the participants had retained aspects of their African past. Most participants clung to symbols of their African heritage such as spirituality and religion, language, food, music, and some cultural products. They continued in these traditions even after immigrating to the United States.

In their homelands participants were met with negative images of Afro-Latin@s in media representations as well as unequal access to employment and education, all of which resulted in lower social class standing. These circumstances had a direct impact on the lives of Afro-Latin@s, causing many to leave their homelands and yield to forced migration. Upon reaching U.S. soil, many reported confronting similar acts of racism when navigating U.S. systems such as

schools, banks, utility companies as well as every day outings such as visits to the grocery store, bingo parlor, or the local park. Participants reported a constant negotiation of racial politics.

At times participants linked arms with other minorities in solidarity, friendship, and marriage and other times they felt it more advantageous to separate themselves from either poorly behaving minorities or those groups of whom whites had a negative perception. Sometimes the participants felt welcomed by fellow minority groups, and other times they felt quite isolated from them. Darker skinned Latinas consistently reported being seen as outsiders amongst lighter skinned Latin@s. Six out of eight participants reported being victims of racism, colorism, or discrimination. Surprisingly, even with limited cultural capital such as full English proficiency, the participants were direct in their confrontations of racism & discrimination. In the wake of both rich African cultural traditions as well as facing difficult racial and ethnic denigrations, the Afro-Latin@s of my study showed incredible agency and resilience.

How do Afro-Latina women immigrants negotiate the intersections of race, class, and gender in their everyday experiences.

By and large participants were conscious and aware of the transversal nature of race, class, and gender. They relayed multiple narratives that revealed their awareness of how race, class, and gender affect their lives both past and present. Participants came from varying socioeconomic classes in their countries of origin. Half traveled to the U.S. due to scarce economic opportunities in their countries of origin while others came to the U.S. as middle class citizens having experienced little depravity in their home countries. Regardless of their prior socio-economic standing, after immigrating to the United States all participants had experienced varying levels of upward mobility. Participants saw their individual mobility as both familial and communal. As they ascended so did their families abroad and in the United States. The participants' socio-economic status in the United States often shifted the class locations of their relatives abroad. I found those who gave the most back to their families to be those who had

come from the greatest degrees of poverty. Upward mobility was achieved through receiving legal U.S. residency or citizenship, immigration and migration, various occupations, entrepreneurship, and pursuing education.

Given that all of my participants were women, they spoke poignantly of the gender practices of Latin America and the United States. Half of the participants reported growing up in a macho-driven environment where the gender oppression of women was rampant in their countries. On the other hand, the remaining participants reported either being reared with and/or acquainted with progressive women. Some read in a more positive light what other participants referred to as *gender oppression*. For example, some participants felt the men of their countries relegated women to the confines of the home, leaving them with limited access to the outside world, employment, education, and socialization. Conversely, other participants described the same phenomenon in positive terms such as lauding the man for taking care of business by not requiring his wife to work. In their own lives, participants valued domestic home responsibilities and management, but sought to live a balanced life of shared responsibilities, irrespective of gender. Regardless of how they read gender dynamics, all of my participants proved to be broad-minded women. Those who had witnessed gender oppression vowed never to succumb to it, while those who had been enriched by seeing modern, fulfilled, progressive women in their communities wished to continue along that path of progress. Most participants saw marriage and relationships as an equal partnership and emphasized collaboration and teamwork. The participants negotiated newly constructed gender paradigms in the following ways. They were all either working or seeking employment. Half did not have male/romantic partners and were comfortably maintaining their livelihood. They were in control of their movements. During the time of this study, three participants traveled internationally to Italy, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic respectively, two were furthering their college educations, and four owned real estate

property in their respective countries of origin while simultaneously maintaining their residences here in the United States. The Afro-Latina women of this study were progressive women who rejected traditional women's roles and who were content and equipped to make their own way.

Finally, in my interviews and subsequent observations of a Dominican hair salon, I was humbled to observe a mutually beneficial partnership emerging between women of color from both the Latina and the African-American populations. The African-American patrons lauded the high degree of skill and professionalism with which the Dominican stylists had perfected their craft. They felt the Dominicans' skill set went beyond that of U.S.-based hair salons. Correspondingly, the Dominican stylists were highly appreciative of their almost 100% African-American clientele. Although the stylists depended on this population for their livelihood, they seemed to genuinely esteem Black women and appreciate not only their business, but also their company. Both the African-Americans and the Dominicans had mutual respect for the other. I deduced that were it not for the language barrier, their relationships could and likely would easily shift from business to social. In fact, it was common for the Dominicans to refer to their African-American patrons as friends. The observations also yielded other data related to standards of beauty.

It seemed that both the stylists and the patrons adapted a Eurocentric notion of beauty while rejecting more Afro-centric standards of beauty. They esteemed long, straight hair as a characteristic of beauty by rejecting short, kinky, curly hair textures. Along with aesthetic appeal, participants also associated long, straight hair with mobility. They admitted that straight hair was often deemed as more acceptable and commonplace in their families, amongst their romantic partners, and in business and employment. Although some participants expressed personally believing that natural afro-textured to curly hair is beautiful, only one of my participants actually embraced her natural texture and wore it on a daily basis. All other participants either

straightened (relaxed or blown out) or lightened the color (blonde) of their natural hair. Most did not feel they were adhering to a dominant Eurocentric standard of beauty, however, they felt they were wearing a hairstyle that was simply more manageable, presentable, acceptable, or even healthier for their hair. Only two research participants, Elisa and Julia, expressed discomfort with accepting and adhering to a notion of beauty that opposed their natural hair textures.

Concluding from my observations, I would like to have seen more appreciation for a wide range of hair types and textures. Amongst the patrons, the fact that Afro-textured, kinky, and curly hairstyles were not even options in the salon visits that I observed suggests that more conversations must be held to combat African-American and Afro-Dominican women's unquestioned acceptance of dominant notions of beauty. Although neither side was ready to shift its practices I found that both sides were quite open to such a dialogue. I do not advocate that women must express their beauty in any one fashion; I truly believe that versatility and diversity are what make women beautiful. I do, however, envision a phenomenon where women of color interrogate the sources of our beliefs and practices as they relate to beauty and body politics.

Implications

One of the goals of this study was to provide a space where underrepresented voices could be heard. In investigating the negotiations of race, class, and gender I aimed to bring cross-cultural awareness by conducting transnational research that would bring the voices of women of the African diaspora to the pages of this dissertation study. I also aimed to expose racial dynamics in order to better understand racial constructs and racial politics as they relate to Latin America and to the United States. The stories that are captured herein are often absent or omitted from our textbooks and curricula. My hope is that these data could be adapted and used as interdisciplinary pedagogical tools that may open dialogues about race, class, and gender dynamics globally as

well as locally. Some ideas for incorporating Afro-Latin@ content into curricula follow. The following can be adapted and modified depending on the discipline and level.

I have incorporated Afro-Latin@ content into my courses for several years. In the past I have invited Afro-Latin@s to give guest lectures to my students. I have used Afro-Latin@ narratives to spark black-brown dialogues around a myriad of issues that are relevant to both groups. I have used Afro-Latin@ pop culture and socially conscious music to make comparisons and connections cross-culturally. Some artists that I have included are the feminist, Cuban rappers Las Krudas and the artistic expression of Afro-Peruvian feminist activist Mónica Carrillo with her song Ghetto Rap. I have also incorporated Carrillo's poetry. I have worked with a local Historically Black College to offer a Hispanic Film Festival between our institutions that included Afro-Latin@ films such as the Dominican film *Sugar*, the Mexican film *Angelitos Negros*, and the Brazilian film *Quilombo* to name a few. I have also incorporated the works of Cuban filmmaker Tomás Gutiérrez Alea that showcase Santería and other African traditions. Being a lover of literature I have introduced Afro-Latin@ writers and poets such as those that begin each section of this dissertation. Afro-Latin@ cultural heritage is so vast and sophisticated that there are a myriad of opportunities for creating dynamic lessons and units of study. The aforementioned encompass a few of the ways that I have incorporated these cultural products into my courses, however the possibilities are boundless.

On a broader level in terms of the academy, along with the fields of Education and Cultural Studies, I also situate this study within the framework of Latin American Studies and more specifically Afro-Latin American Studies. Latin American Studies is interdisciplinary and incorporates disciplines such as anthropology, gender studies, geography, history, economics, literature, political science, and sociology. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, traditionally Latin-American Studies programs “focus on the history, society, politics,

culture, and economics of one or more of the Hispanic peoples of the North and South American Continents outside Canada and the United States, including the study of the Pre-Columbian period and the flow of immigrants from other societies.” My study certainly fits within this definition; however, it expands the traditional scope of Latin American Studies to illuminate the voices of Afro-descendants, voices that have been historically omitted from the field of study.

This study filled a gap where Afro-Latin@s are underrepresented in the literary canon and where Afro-Latina’s voices are overwhelmingly absent. I urge educators to incorporate Afro-Latin@ narratives and cultural heritage into their curriculum in order to more accurately represent the richness of Latin America’s diverse populations. Educators might also facilitate conversations that draw comparisons and connections between various groups based on race, class, and gender. I encourage educators to go beyond traditional representations of Latino communities to include a deeper and more intense analysis of race, class, and gender, and thereby promoting social justice pedagogy. According to Hines-Gaither (2014), educators must “demystify social justice by explaining ...that social justice does not have to mean standing on a picket line or changing a law. It may very well be as simple, yet profound, as incorporating marginalized voices into the classroom space” (As quoted by Glynn et al, 2014, p. 22).

Closing Thoughts

I encourage scholars to continue to contribute to the emerging field of Afro-Latin@ research. In the global age of the 21st century, there are many opportunities for transnational research collaborations. I acknowledge the importance of being actively engaged in local, regional, and national communities of scholarship; however, in order to contribute to this growing body of published works I would also promote a vision of transnational research especially amongst people of color and women. Such scholarly communities of solidarity can only help to

strengthen our collective struggle for social justice while mediating the injustices of race, class, and gender both within and beyond our borders.

Michelle Wallace (1995) envisioned, “Perhaps a multicultural women’s movement is somewhere in the future” (p. 226). Responding to Wallace’s vision, feminist scholars such as African-Americans Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, and Cleonora Hudson-Weems, Indians Chandra Mohanty and Uma Narayan, Africans Ama Ata Aidoo (Ghanaian), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Nigerian) and Mary Kolawole (Nigerian), Latinas Gloria Anzaldúa, Mónica Carrillo, and Ginetta Candelario along with countless others have advocated for a new vision of feminism: *a feminism without borders*. Given that waves of cross-cultural migration are occurring throughout the world, I argue that transnational feminist research can be local as well as global, as this study demonstrates. As scholars, we often remain segregated in terms of research partnerships and participant selections. This study has shown that voices throughout the African diaspora, particularly women, remain underrepresented but yet are longing to be unearthed. Greater collaborations amongst people of color and women can have a scholarly impact that may very well lead to political solidarity. I look forward to future research that includes Afro-descendant women of the diaspora. Since women’s voices often represent the plight of their families and communities, I am hopeful that transnational feminist collaborations may shift global concerns from the margins to the center.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. *Cultural Heritage*: How would you describe your cultural background? [**¿Cómo describiría su herencia cultural?**]
2. *Afro-Latinidad*: What factors influence you to identify as an Afro-Latina? [**¿Por qué identifica Ud. como una mujer africana?**]
3. *Afro-Latinidad*: How would you describe African/Black cultural experiences in your country or origin? [**¿Cómo describiría sus experiencias e influencias africanas en su país de origen?**]
4. *Afro-Latinidad/Cultural Heritage*: What do you love/are proud of about being [insert term here that participant uses to self-identify], & what are the challenges of having this identity. [**¿Qué le gusta más de ser afrodescendiente? ¿De qué está muy orgullosa de su herencia cultural? ¿Cuáles son los desafíos de esta etnicidad?**]
5. *Race in Latin America*: Can you describe race relations in your native country? [**¿Cómo describiría las relaciones raciales en su país de origen?**]
6. *Race in United States*: How have you experienced race in the United States? How do these experiences compare to your home country? [**Según sus observaciones y experiencias ¿Cómo describiría Ud. las relaciones raciales aquí en los EE.UU. en comparación con su país?**]
7. *Immigration*: What brought you to the United States? What surprised you upon arriving in the United States/the South? [**¿Por qué vino Ud. a EE.UU inicialmente? Al llegar aquí ¿qué le sorprendió sobre Los EE.UU. o especialmente del sur de Los EE.UU.?**]
8. *Perceptions*: Can you give examples of how other U.S. Americans have perceived your racial or ethnic background? [**¿Cómo perciben los americanos su etnicidad o rasgos físicos?**]
9. *Perceptions*: Upon arriving in the United States, how did/do you perceive other Americans of various ethnicities (Latinos, African-Americans, Whites, etc.)? Were these perceptions brought from your home country or constructed in the United States? [**Al llegar a EE.UU. ¿Cuál fue su percepción de los diferentes grupos étnicos que ud. conoció? ¿Se originaron estas percepciones aquí en los EE.UU, o en su país?**]
10. *Connections*: In what ways do you (or do you *not*) identify with U.S. Americans of different races & ethnicities? [**¿Se identifica o no con los estadounidenses de los grupos étnicos? ¿Cuáles son las semejanzas y diferencias entre los grupos?**]
11. *Social Class*: In your home country/United States, how has class impacted your life? [**¿Cómo describiría su clase o nivel social en su país?**]

12. *Connections:* Now that you reside in the United States, what strategies do you use to stay connected to your cultural heritage? [**Ahora que está viviendo en EE.UU, ¿cómo mantiene la conexión con su herencia cultural?**]
13. *Gender:* How has gender impacted your experiences in your home country/United States? [**¿Describa cómo el papel de las mujeres ha influido sus experiencias en su país y también aquí en EE.UU?**]
14. *Gender:* How have you fashioned relationships with other women? [**¿Cómo son sus relaciones y sociales con las mujeres estadounidenses?**]
15. *Afro-Latinidad:* Related to your Afro-Latino cultural heritage, what is a message that you would like to leave for the readers of my work? [**Relacionado con su herencia africana, ¿qué mensaje le gustaría dejar para los lectores de mi estudio?**]
16. *Conclusion:* Is there anything that I did not ask that you would like to add? [**¿Desea añadir algo más a sus comentarios?**]

APPENDIX B

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO: CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT

UNIVERSIDAD DE CAROLINA DEL NORTE-GREENSBORO CONSENTIMIENTO DE PARTICIPANTE HUMANO

Project Title: Negotiations of Race, Class, and Gender Among Afro-Latina Women Immigrants to the Southern United States

Título del Proyecto: Negociaciones de Asuntos de Raza, Género, y Clase Social entre Mujeres Afro-Latinas en el Sur de Los Estados Unidos

Principal Investigator and Faculty Advisor: Krishana Hines-Gaither and Dr. Leila Villaverde

Investigadora Principal y Asesora Académica: Krishana Hines-Gaither y la Dra. Leila Villaverde

Participant's Name: _____

Nombre de Participante: _____

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. There may not be any direct benefit to you for being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies. If you choose not to be in the study or leave the study before it is done, it will not affect your relationship with the researcher or the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Details about this study are discussed in this consent form. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

You will be given a copy of this consent form. If you have any questions about this study at any time, you should ask the researchers named in this consent form. Their contact information is below.

¿Cuál es la información general que debería saber sobre el estudio investigativo?

Por este medio solicitamos su participación en un estudio investigativo. Su participación en esta investigación es completamente voluntaria y usted es libre de retirarse en cualquier momento sin importar el motivo, sin castigo o sanción.

El propósito de los estudios de investigación es obtener nueva información o conocimiento. Nueva información obtenida mediante este estudio puede que ayude a otras personas en el futuro. Es posible que usted no obtenga beneficios directos al participar en este estudio. También, podrían haber riesgos al participar en estudios investigativos. Si decidiera no participar en este estudio o retirarse antes de que se termine, esto no afectaría su relación con la investigadora ni con la Universidad de Carolina del Norte-Greensboro. Este formulario de consentimiento informado contiene los detalles del estudio. Es importante que comprenda esta información para que pueda tomar una decisión informada en cuanto a su elección de participar en este estudio.

Usted recibirá una copia de este formulario de consentimiento informado. Si tiene alguna pregunta sobre este estudio en cualquier instante, no dude en preguntar a las investigadoras mencionadas en este formulario de consentimiento informado. Los contactos de las investigadoras se encuentran a continuación.

What is the study about?

You are invited to participate in a research study. Your participation is completely voluntary. The purpose of this study is to learn about Afro-Latina women's experiences with race in their country of origin as well as their experiences with race in the United States. This research is being conducted as part of Krishauna Hines-Gaither's graduate program as a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro.

¿De qué se trata el estudio?

Se solicita su participación en un estudio investigativo. Su participación es completamente voluntaria. El propósito de esta investigación es aprender sobre las experiencias raciales de las mujeres Afro-Latinas en sus países de origen tanto como sus experiencias raciales en los Estados Unidos. Esta investigación es parte del programa posgrado de Krishauna Hines-Gaither quien es estudiante doctoral en la Universidad de Carolina del Norte-Greensboro.

Why are you asking me?

The investigator is asking you to participate because she believes that you have the unique experience of being a woman of African descent who was born and raised in Latin America, and later immigrated to the United States.

¿Por qué me invita a mí a participar?

La investigadora solicita su participación porque cree que usted ha tenido experiencias únicas como una mujer de descendencia africana, nacida y criada en Latinoamérica, quien luego ha inmigrado a los Estados Unidos.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?

As a part of your participation in the study, the investigator requests to interview you twice, once in a group setting along with your family or friends respectively, and then once individually. Each interview should take about 2 hours and will occur over the course of a couple of weeks. We will likely complete the bulk of the interview during the first group session, and we will use the second individual interview to follow up on anything that was missed or anything that you would like to add after reflecting. The investigator will arrange the time and location of the interviews based on what is most convenient for you.

The investigator would also like to observe you, along with your group participants, in a natural setting such as a social outing, family gathering, church program, etc. The observation would be done with the other members of your group with whom you gave the group interview. The totality of the observations will last 2-3 hours. Observations can be done in one setting or they can be divided into different events. The purpose of the observation is to observe how you interact with others in daily living. The investigator would be specifically observing to assess how race, class, and gender play into your daily experiences as an Afro-Latina woman.

To ensure the accuracy of your statements, the investigator may ask you to *member check*, which is to review the transcripts for accuracy before publication.

Should you need further clarity on any portion of the study, you may contact the principal investigator, Krishauna Hines-Gaither at klhines@uncg.edu o 336-287-0857.

Si decidiera participar, ¿qué me pediría que hiciera?

Como parte de su participación, la investigadora le solicitara dos entrevistas de aproximadamente 2 horas cada una, durante un período de dos o tres semanas. La primera es una entrevista en grupo con sus parientes o amistades respectivas, y la segunda es una entrevista individual. Es muy probable que se completen la mayoría de las preguntas durante la primera entrevista, pero la segunda servirá para añadir información olvidada u omitida. La investigadora se pondrá de acuerdo con usted en cuanto a la hora y el lugar más conveniente para usted.

A la investigadora le gustaría observarle a Ud. con las otras participantes de su grupo en un ámbito natural como una salida social, salida familiar, o programa de la iglesia etc. Esta observación se llevaría a cabo adjunto a los participantes de su entrevista en grupo. La totalidad de las observaciones durará unas 2-3 horas. Las observaciones pueden llevarse a cabo en una sola salida o durante dos salidas distintas. El propósito de las observaciones es determinar cómo Ud. interactúa con otras personas en su vida diaria. Específicamente, la investigadora le observaría para investigar como la raza, la clase social y el género afectan sus experiencias cotidianas como una mujer Afro-Latina.

Para asegurarse de la exactitud de sus palabras, es posible que la investigadora le pida repasar las transcripciones antes de que sean publicadas.

Si la investigadora puede aclarar cualquier parte del estudio, Ud. puede ponerse en contacto con ella mediante el correo electrónico klhines@uncg.edu o 336-287-0857.

Is there any audio/video recording?

During the interviews and observations, the investigator requests your permission to audio record them to ensure greater accuracy and representation of your responses. The dissertation chair, Dr. Leila Villaverde, a transcriber and the investigator will be the only people who will have access to your audiotaped responses. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tape, your confidentiality for things you say on the tape cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the tape as described below.

¿Hay grabación de algún tipo?

La investigadora solicitara de su permiso para grabar el audio de las entrevistas y las observaciones para asegurarse de la exactitud y representación apropiada de sus respuestas.

Solamente la asesora académica, la Dra. Leila Villaverde, un transcriptor y la investigadora tendrán acceso a todos los apuntes, grabaciones y documentos de la investigación obtenidos durante las entrevistas y las observaciones. Puesto que es posible que alguien que escuche la grabación reconozca su voz y la pueda identificar, no se puede garantizar la confidencialidad de lo que usted diga. Sin embargo, la investigadora intentará limitar el acceso a la grabación. Los detalles de la confidencialidad siguen a continuación.

How will you keep my information confidential?

The name and identity of the participant is confidential and only known to the investigator. Your legal name will only be known by the investigator. The investigator will not use your name in this research study and any time that she refers to you she will use a pseudonym (fictitious name) to protect your confidentiality. The investigator will save all files related to the study electronically; they will be only accessible by a username and password. The investigator will save any files that may contain the participants' true identity in a separate file so that her fictitious name cannot be linked to her true identity. The files will be saved for five years following the completion of the study, after which they will be destroyed. All information obtained in this study will be kept strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

¿Cómo va a mantener la información confidencial?

El nombre e identidad de la participante son confidenciales y solo son conocidos por la investigadora. Los nombres verdaderos/legales de las participantes no se usaran en ninguna parte del estudio, incluyendo el estudio publicado. En la tesis y durante la presentación de la investigación, la investigadora identificará a la participante por un seudónimo (nombre ficticio). La investigadora guardará todos los archivos del estudio en archivos electrónicos que solamente son accesibles con un nombre del usuario y contraseña. La investigadora guardará cualquier archivo que contenga su identificación verdadera en un archivo separado con los nombres ficticios; los dos archivos no estarán vinculados. La investigadora mantendrá guardados los datos del estudio por 5 años después de que se termine la investigación. Después de los 5 años, se destruirán los datos. Toda la información obtenida en este estudio se mantendrá estrictamente confidencial a menos que la ley requiera de su divulgación.

What are the risks to me?

If any of the interview questions make you uncomfortable, you may choose not to respond. The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. If you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Krishauna Hines-Gaither at klhines@uncg.edu or 336-287-0857 or the Academic Advisor Dr. Leila Villaverde at levillav@uncg.edu or 336-334-3475.

If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study please contact the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351.

¿Cuáles son los riesgos de participar?

Si cualquier pregunta de la entrevista la hace sentir incómoda, usted tiene derecho a no contestarla. La Junta Revisora Institucional de UNCG (Institutional Review Board) ha determinado que este estudio presenta riesgos mínimos para el participante. Si usted tiene preguntas, desea más información, o tiene sugerencias, favor de ponerse en contacto con

Krishnauna Hines-Gaither al klhines@uncg.edu, 336-287-0857 o la asesora académica, la Dra. Leila Villaverde al levillav@uncg.edu, 336-334-3475.

Si tiene preocupaciones sobre sus derechos, la manera en la que se le ha tratado, otras preocupaciones o quejas sobre este estudio o comentarios sobre los beneficios asociados con su participación en este estudio, favor de ponerse en contacto con la Oficina de Investigaciones de Integridad (Office of Research Integrity) a UNCG. Puede llamar sin cargo al (855)-251-2351.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?

The benefits of this study are that your data may help to fill a gap in the research where Afro-Latina's voices are historically and currently underrepresented. In addition, your participation may help the researcher to develop conclusions that may be helpful in better understanding and addressing cross-cultural relationships as well as racial dynamics.

¿Hay beneficios para la sociedad debido a mi participación en el estudio?

Los beneficios de este estudio incluyen el que la información obtenida podría ayudarle a la investigadora a ofrecer más información útil sobre este tema siendo que hay una escasez de voces Afro-Latinas representadas en la literatura. Además, su participación podría ayudarle a la investigadora a desarrollar conclusiones y resultados que podrían ser útiles para mejor comprensión de las relaciones interculturales y raciales.

Are there any benefits to *me* for taking part in this research study?

There are no direct benefits to participants in this study.

¿Hay beneficios personales si yo participo en el estudio?

No hay beneficios directos a los participantes de este estudio.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

¿Me compensará por mi participación? ¿Tendré que pagar por participar?

Los participantes no pagan nada por participar en el estudio, ni serán compensados por su participación.

What if I want to leave the study?

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time after you have begun, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. Your decision will not affect any future contact you have with the researcher or with the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. The investigators also have the right to stop your participation at any time. This could be because you have had an unexpected reaction, or have failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped.

¿Qué tal si quiero retirarme del estudio?

En cualquier momento, usted tiene el derecho a rehusar su participación y es libre de retirarse de este estudio de investigación después de haber empezado, sin castigo o sanción. Si se retirara, no le afectaría a Ud. de ninguna manera, ni afectaría su futura relación con la investigadora o la Universidad de Carolina del Norte-Greensboro. Si decidiera retirarse, Ud. podría solicitar sus

datos personales que fueron recopilados durante la investigación al menos que estén guardados en una forma inidentificable. Las investigadoras tienen derecho a retirarle a usted del estudio en cualquier instante. Esto puede resultar a causa de una reacción suya inesperada, el no seguir las instrucciones o porque la investigadora decidió terminar el estudio.

What about new information/changes in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

¿Qué tal si hay nueva información/cambios en el estudio?

Si el estudio revelara información nueva que podría afectar su inclinación de participar, la investigadora le proveerá esta información.

Voluntary Consent by Participant

By signing this consent form you are agreeing that you read, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate.

Consentimiento Voluntario del Participante

Al firmar este formulario de consentimiento usted está confirmando que leyó el documento por sí misma, o que alguien se lo leyó, y que usted entiende por completo el contenido de este documento y accede a participar voluntariamente en este estudio. Mediante este documento está afirmando que se han contestado todas sus preguntas con respecto al estudio. Al firmar este documento, está afirmando que tiene 18 años o es mayor de 18 años de edad y afirma su participación.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Firma: _____

Fecha: _____